

Hip Hop, Bluegrass, Banjos, and Solidarity: Race and Class Histories in Appalachia U.S.A

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation examines the historical race and class tensions across the United States, and particularly focuses on Appalachia as a potential place of resistance against racial and class injustice. Arguing for a thick cross-racial solidarity movement, I examine the history of Black oppression from slavery to current modes of oppression such as mass incarceration and colorblind constitutionalism. The presence of anti-Black racism and under acknowledgement of whiteness hinders any form of cross-racial solidarity. To combat this, I ask, are the genres of hip hop, bluegrass, and country able to provide a reckoning of the continual racial oppression of Black people and an acknowledgement of whiteness, in Appalachia and the U.S.? I examine the historical progression of bluegrass and country, and hip hop, through the history of the banjo and music industry. The banjo, an African instrument, links Appalachia with histories of both Black expression and racial oppression. From here, I argue that the history of the music industry provides a further understanding of racial injustice that is parallel to the instances of institutional racial injustice in the U.S. This history provides evidence that Black artists used their music to enable social movements and resistance against systemic racial injustice in the U.S. Throughout several chapters, I analyze the many untold, forgotten, and hidden histories of Black racial violence that exists in the U.S. and Appalachia, and how music operates as a tool of resistance that can enable Black liberation against racial injustice. Through an examination of racial injustice in my hometown of Martinsville, Virginia, and using music as a tool, I suggest that, a thick cross-racial solidarity can exist with a recognition of historical racial injustice against

Blacks, both locally and nationally, an acknowledgment of whiteness, an anti-racist framework for community activism, and a centering of Black voice, narrative, and Black liberation.

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-Patrick Salmons

Preface

This project is about suffering, pain, racism, class antagonism, and music, but most importantly it is about hope and love. Early on in my education, coming from the small town of Bassett, Virginia, adjacent to the city of Martinsville, I was shy and timid. Through the guidance of great mentors, I have become more confident and engaged in the change needed in this world. This project began in 2013 when I first heard the music of Kendrick Lamar. From then, I began to listen to stories of racial injustice, and I wondered why these problems existed. Without hip hop I would have never confronted my own position, and I would not have written this dissertation. This project is one of love, because without the love of so many that took the time to talk to a shy, small-town Appalachian kid, this would not be possible. It is a project of hope, because I hope it can make an impact of some kind in the neighborhoods I grew up in. I hope it can get people talking, and that it can provide an understanding of the problems that exist in Martinsville and around the world. This project, in many ways, is my hopeful love letter back home. I will always sing about my hometown, and I will do my best to always stand with those oppressed, who combat racial injustice and class oppression that is so prominent in this country. I urge everyone to listen to the music, hear the echoes, and join against these evil white supremacist systems that separate us. In these times and always, we must stand together and empathically yell, “Black Lives Matter!” This is for everyone back home, and for everyone who lost their life to the violent injustice of systemic racism. You will never be forgotten, and your story must be told. Last, but not least, this is for my Mom and Dad. Thank you both for instilling in me the virtues of love and kindness. I hope I have made you proud.

-Patrick Salmons

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Introduction

Oscar Grant, Trayvon Martin, Eric Garner, Michael Brown, George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, Tamir Rice, are all names synonymous with police brutality and the Black community.

Unfortunately, this list grows each day and people within Black communities live in fear of not only the police but armed vigilantes who track and murder Black men, as was the case with Ahmaud Arbery.¹ The Black Lives Matter movement (BLM) is a response to police brutality and racism that is prominent throughout the country. BLM, along with other social movements have had great success unifying people, primarily Black, across the United States (U.S.). This project provides potential avenues for how whites in Appalachia can be united with groups such as BLM, forming a movement that acknowledges and addresses the historical racial oppression of Black people in the U.S. This is not to say that African Americans need the involvement of white activism in Appalachia. Rather, despite issues with race and class, solidarity can exist across similar political, social, and economic issues by acknowledging the long history of oppression and rich cultural connections available in Appalachia. I particularly focus on Appalachia as a place of connection because I grew up in Martinsville, Virginia, in the foothills of the Appalachian Mountains. The stories and narratives that exist here are intricately connected but also forgotten. Appalachia is a region with a rich musical and cultural history, a region wrought with socio-economic problems, political mis-representation, environmental degradation, and harmful inaccurate stereotypes of its citizens. Appalachia is a place of diverse intercultural exchange and beauty, with a long history of resistance against oppressive institutions.

¹ Richard Fausset, "What We Know About the Shooting Death of Ahmaud Arbery," *The New York Times*, February 28, 2021, sec. U.S., <https://www.nytimes.com/article/ahmaud-arbery-shooting-georgia.html>.

Placing emphasis on both history and music, I engage with the history of race and class in the U.S. and Appalachia broadly and then connect it to the history of the music industry that emphasizes multiple genres, untold histories, and avenues for social change. Both main themes are connected by racial oppression and the historical silencing of Black people in Appalachia, as well as the rest of the U.S. Within music, I examine both hip hop and bluegrass and country as pivotal because of their connections to specific places and histories. Hip hop exists primarily in Black communities as a Black cultural practice. Bluegrass is tied to Appalachian history and communities. The banjo has a prominent place throughout this project, which was brought to Appalachia by enslaved Africans. Throughout the U.S., bluegrass and banjo music is promoted as “white Appalachian music,” yet its main instrument is originally African. This leads the project in many directions, including how race, class, and the linked histories of cultural exchange have segregated people and music. Without an understanding and reckoning with these pasts, solidarity will never be possible. Therefore, the project focuses on how place is pivotal in reckoning with these racial histories and narratives and musical development establishing an acknowledgement of the past and potentially a solidarity movement in Martinsville, Virginia. This project thus asks the question; does the banjo and Appalachia connect to people, or does it prevent such connections due to the racial history behind them?

I propose that connecting people across race and class barriers through a recognition and acknowledgement of systemic anti-black racism and the similar messaging and connections found in music and the development of the music industry can be accomplished in Appalachia, particularly my hometown of Martinsville, Virginia. Consequently, the major question I ask is multi-faceted in its approach, as I examine the political, social, and cultural impacts that music (especially hip hop, rap, country, blues, and bluegrass) have on society and the formation of a

solidarity movement. I ask are the genres of hip hop, bluegrass, and country able to provide a recognition of the continual racial injustice against Black people and an acknowledgement of whiteness in Appalachia and the U.S.?

To answer this question, I argue that these genres of music can provide an avenue for the recognition of race and class oppression and potentially provide a cross-racial solidarity movement. I examine the historical progression of bluegrass and country and the music industry by tracing the utilization of the banjo. The banjo operates as a theoretical lens, linking Appalachia with histories of Black expression and racial oppression. I argue that the racist history of the music industry provides historical links and connections to Appalachia, and although they are troubling, often filled with minstrelsy and racial oppression of Black people, they provide moments of resistance from Black and white artists alike. Similarly, I examine the progression of Black musical art forms including the banjo, string bands, blues, jazz, soul and funk, and lastly hip hop. A close examination of the music industry and its segregation, oppression, and exploitation of Black artists reveals the way U.S. social, political, and economic racial oppression is aligned with the development of the music industry. Continually, Black artists are disenfranchised, segregated from white artists, stolen from, and silenced, unable to express themselves through genres of music that they helped create. Despite this, this project provides numerous examples of Black artists reinventing musical forms and genres, resisting racial and class injustice, and speaking back against an industry and country that persists in its efforts to silence and oppress them.

This reinvention of musical styles led to further racial exploitation from the music industry, but it also provided a platform for Black voices to speak out against racial injustice. From the early Black banjo griots in Appalachia, to current day hip hop artists such as Kendrick

Lamar, I demonstrate that despite efforts of the music industry to silence Black artists and their musical talents, Black artists have always overcome these efforts and provide a method of resistance against racial injustice. These many Black artists enabled numerous social movements that provide tools for solidarity and racial justice across the country, and particularly in Appalachia. Despite the problems of commercialized music, hip hop, and bluegrass and country, provide banjo echoes that addresses the harmful segregation and racial oppression of Blacks by the music industry and U.S. institutions. These banjo echoes, which express the terrors of racial injustice and hope for Black liberation, are present in Black voices heard around the country. I argue that for any form of solidarity to exist in Appalachia, whites must listen to, and enable, these banjo echoes that call for racial justice, acknowledge their whiteness, and allow Black voices to lead in efforts to liberate the region from racial injustice.

To fully examine these questions, this project provides an extensive amount of empirical data, theory, and interpretive methods. Additionally, there is a need to relay the historical development of race and class as it is intertwined with musical development. This depends crucially on the connections made between the segregation of music as a method of Black racial control and oppression, as well as an establishment of class inferiority associated with the region of Appalachia. Again, the primary goal of this project is not to consider whether hip hop, bluegrass, and country have the same political impact in their respective communities; rather, this project asks whether music can revive and reckon with the fractured memories and systemic racism present in the region and around the U.S. Without an acknowledgement and reckoning of this history, cross-racial solidarity is not possible.

Review of Literature

Hip hop and social movements have become synonymous with one another. Hip hop culture is connected to protests, social movements, and the discussion of racial oppression in society.

Activism in Appalachia, while limited regarding Black liberation, has worked via social and community activism against human rights violations, mining, and more recently pipelines. Rich traditions of narratives and protest music in Appalachia provides a new understanding of activism in Appalachia. This analysis provides indications of potential solidarity in Appalachia amongst racial groups via cross cultural musical exchange. The goal of this review of literature is to examine the major themes and trends within the scholarship of hip hop, bluegrass, and Appalachia.

Perhaps the seminal author on hip hop, Tricia Rose, wrote the highly influential work, *Black Noise: Rap Music and Black Culture in Contemporary America*. Rose describes hip hop as a cultural politics through lyrical expression, a noise that presents itself as knowledge and a contestation of public space through a defined cultural aesthetic.² Rose's sentiments have been expanded upon as a prominent trend in hip hop scholarship, in which many authors engage in similar ethnography to better understand intricate webs of racial and cultural representation.³ Therefore, a major paradigm of hip hop scholarship is the ability of hip hop culture, via rap, dance, and artistic expression, to communicate with younger minority populations. Early concerns of hip hop scholarship primarily engage with the racialized aspects of US society and

² Tricia Rose, *Black Noise: Rap Music and Black Culture in Contemporary America* (Hanover: Wesleyan University Press, 1994), 128.

³ Anthony Kwame Harrison, *Hip Hop Underground: The Integrity and Ethics of Racial Identification* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2009). Samuel Craig Watkins, *Hip Hop Matters: Politics, Pop Culture, and the Struggle for the Soul of a Movement* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2005).

the development of this new genre of music and culture that provided a place of escape, expression, and racial critique for oppressed Black and minority populations.⁴

Hip hop consists of people and artists who speak out against racism in society, developing a voice that is critical of oppressive racial hierarchy in the U.S. via police brutality, poverty, and violence.⁵ As the genre of hip hop garnered critical attention of listeners and scholars alike, so too did the commercialization and widespread negative stereotypes of gangsta culture and Black life. The music industry created caricatures of blackness, a supposed “realness”, to sell the music to a white audience.⁶ “Hip hop is in crisis” is a reifying statement for Rose, who once praised the ability of hip hop to connect, exchange, and offer political and social expression.⁷ Thus, hip hop while allowing for new voices, struggles as a genre because of racialized stereotypes created by the music industry that emphasizes capital, greed, and exploitation. Despite this, Rose, as well as other writers such as Kwame Harrison, Reiland Rabaka, Patricia Hill Collins, Jeff Chang, Michael Eric Dyson, Clarence Lusane, and Monica Miller illustrate the power of hip hop to unite groups of people through artistic and cultural expression, especially within urban spaces.⁸ These authors highlight the problematic lyrics, dangerous stereotypes and racism against Black communities in the genre, creating a mass

⁴ Russell Potter, *Spectacular Vernaculars: Hip-Hop and the Politics of Postmodernism*, SUNY Series in Postmodern Culture (New York: SUNY Press, 1995). Clarence Lusane, “Rap, Race and Politics,” *Race & Class* 35, no. 1 (July 1, 1993): 41–56. Bakari Kitwana, *The Hip-Hop Generation: Young Blacks and the Crisis in African-American Culture* (New York: Basic Books, 2003).

⁵ Artists typically include: N.W.A, Tupac Shakur, A Tribe Called Quest, among others. For current examples of artists with similar conscious styles see Kendrick Lamar, J. Cole, 2 Chainz, Vince Staples, Joey Bada\$\$, Earl Sweatshirt, Denzel Curry, and others.

⁶ Tricia Rose, *The Hip Hop Wars: What We Talk About When We Talk About Hip Hop--and Why It Matters* (New York: Basic Books, 2008).

⁷ *Ibid.*, 1-20

⁸ Jeff Chang, *Can't Stop Won't Stop: A History of the Hip-Hop Generation* (New York: Picador, 2005). Mark Anthony Neal, *What the Music Said: Black Popular Music and Black Public Culture* (New York: Routledge, 1999). Patricia Hill Collins, *From Black Power to Hip Hop: Racism, Nationalism, and Feminism* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2006). S. Pearce. “Rap's Fraught history with Black Lives Matter: 'I didn't sign up to be no activist'.” *The Guardian*, 2016. Reiland Rabaka, *The Hip Hop Movement: From R&B and the Civil Rights Movement to Rap and the Hip Hop Generation* (New York: Lexington Books, 2013).

market to listeners looking for this racialized depiction of a “thug” lifestyle.⁹ These texts thus raise the following question: does hip hop accurately depict the listeners and artists it claims to personify?

Rose asserts in her work that while hip hop culture and rap music have cultivated new voices, they have also silenced many through greed and a continuation of racist Black stereotypes. The numerous examples of exploitation, misogyny, murder, and depictions of capitalist greed have compelled scholars to declare hip hop incapable of successfully enabling positive social change. Profit and status within the industry have created a substantial critique that current trends in hip hop do little to help the communities often associated with the music. Lester Spence in his work, *Stare in the Darkness: The Limits of Hip-hop and Black Politics*, argues that neoliberal capitalist exploitation has created harmful messages about Black life and culture, making it difficult to use hip hop as a starting point for Black politics.¹⁰ Accordingly, Reiland Rabaka notes that hip hop is not immune to the problems within society, especially a dominant white capitalist one. This scholarship, however, while factual, “negates the principled and politically progressive elements of hip hop culture.”¹¹ Hip hop culture and identity is intricately tied to a Black radical tradition of resistance that Cedric Robinson illuminates in his work *Black Marxism*. One that continues to reinvent itself in the face of white supremacy and progress towards new prospects of liberation. While corporations and music empires decide what music is successful, this project emphasizes that those who listen, write, and perform hip hop music also have a responsibility to enact change. It is because of this that hip hop exemplifies

⁹ Bakari Kitwana, *The Hip-Hop Generation: Young Blacks and the Crisis in African-American Culture* (New York: Basic Books, 2003).

¹⁰ Lester K. Spence, *Stare in the Darkness: The Limits of Hip-Hop and Black Politics* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2011).

¹¹ Rabaka. The Hip Hop Movement, 326. Bettina L. Love, “Good Kids, Mad Cities: Kendrick Lamar and Finding Inner Resistance in Response to Ferguson USA,” *Cultural Studies ↔ Critical Methodologies* 16, no. 3 (June 1, 2016): 320–23.

Black struggle in a white western paradigm. Consequently, Robinson notes, “Black opposition to domination has continued to acquire new forms.” Hip hop is a prime contemporary example of one such form.¹² Situating these arguments in discussion with the Black radical tradition helps delineate hip hop as a transformative discussion that occurs within new modes of thinking about the public sphere. Therefore, the central themes of hip hop scholarship are heavily reliant on the transformative aspects of the cultures it harvested, as well as the ability of these cultures to cross racial and class barriers. Thus, a persistent argument in the literature concerns how transformative hip hop can be in politics if it too operates under white western capitalist structures. I examine these tenets further throughout the dissertation.

African American Religions, hip hop, and Appalachian music

African American religions, cultures, and historical social movements can be understood through hip hop, early developments of “country” music, and the history of the Appalachian region. The early development of country music presents a sonic color line that sought to separate African Americans from white Americans. This feature of the music industry, oft overlooked, is analyzed by Karl Miller, who asserts that African American music and cultures were mocked through minstrel acts and readopted in the form of country or folk music for profit. It became a matter of performing race and creating myths of white performativity as ideal through a supposed Black inferiority.¹³ Sylvester Johnson echoes this via religion with his rendering of the destruction of

¹² Cedric J. Robinson, *Black Marxism: The Making of the Black Radical Tradition* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2000), 3.

¹³ Karl Hagstrom Miller, *Segregating Sound: Inventing Folk and Pop Music in the Age of Jim Crow* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010). Jennifer Lynn Stoeber, *The Sonic Color Line: Race and the Cultural Politics of Listening* (New York: NYU Press, 2016).

African religions, peoples, and representation throughout the late 16th century to present day.¹⁴

Johnson's work explains the religious and racial oppression Blacks in the U.S. experience.

Ironically, religion has become a place of resistance for African Americans through social movements and activism, despite the historical oppression that comes with it.¹⁵

Scholars of hip hop and religion studies note similar themes. Monica Miller observes this in her work with a description of the myriad of ways that hip hop uses religion to create meaning rather than widely accepted understanding of the opposite. This tenet in the literature examines hip hop as culturally diverse fluid expressions that lacks attention from religion scholars yet captivates generations of people around the world.¹⁶ Hip hop is playful, challenging and multifaceted, especially in the category of religion, where "rap music has profound connections to the various religious traditions found within African American communities."¹⁷ One of the first and prominent scholars in this field, Anthony Pinn, provides these numerous connections to Christianity as well as the Nation of Islam in the field of rap and hip hop cultures or identities.¹⁸ He demonstrates how hip hop artists like Wu-Tang clan, and N.W.A use religion as a method of resistance against oppressive white structures. Cleverly, artists such as these used Christian and Islamic teachings to demonstrate problems of society, and those who say they follow God, yet act differently. Links of hip hop and the practices of religion historically trace back to other styles of music that provided similar resistance to oppression.¹⁹ The musical genres of blues,

¹⁴ Sylvester A. Johnson, *African American Religions, 1500–2000* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 154-6.

¹⁵ Ibid., Cedric J. Robinson, *Black Movements in America* (New York: Routledge, 1997). Patricia Hill Collins, *From Black Power to Hip Hop: Racism, Nationalism, and Feminism* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2006). Ralph Basui Watkins, *Hip-Hop Redemption: Finding God in the Rhythm and the Rhyme* (Ada: Baker Academic, 2011).

¹⁶ Monica R. Miller, *Religion and Hip Hop* (New York: Routledge, 2013).

¹⁷ Anthony B. Pinn, ed., *Noise and Spirit: The Religious and Spiritual Sensibilities of Rap Music* (New York: NYU Press, 2003), 21.

¹⁸ Monica R. Miller and Anthony B. Pinn, eds., *The Hip Hop and Religion Reader* (New York: Routledge, 2015).

¹⁹ Reiland Rabaka, *The Hip Hop Movement: From R&B and the Civil Rights Movement to Rap and the Hip Hop Generation* (New York: Lexington Books, 2013).

bluegrass, jazz, and country demonstrate these connections and are of major focus throughout this project. By examining the development of the music industry alongside systemic racism against Blacks, a pattern of resistance against these institutions and the continuation of white supremacy are made more visible in the music industry.

Scholarship on religion and hip hop emphasizes who is participating and how they are participating. Although a new field, religion and hip hop studies endeavors into a recognizable academic field that is charting hip hop as the primary subject in all dimensions. Miller, Pinn, and Dyson, among others, have provided pivotal understandings of hip hop and its interdisciplinary take on culture, religion, and society. These authors are concerned with, how hip hop applies contemporary religious practices. These themes and conversations within religion and hip hop studies present a clearer picture of hip hop's malleability within cultural constraints. They also link hip hop to Black songs and music found throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries in places like Appalachia.

Appalachia in Solidarity?

The history of Appalachia intertwines with historical racial oppression, musical development, and solidarity. Christianity was a primary factor in community development in Appalachia because those who settled in the mountains were primarily from England, Ireland, and other English speaking European countries having settled during the time of the Great Awakening in the eighteenth century due to religious beliefs and persecution.²⁰ Richard Drake's account of Appalachia describes religion as a primary feature because of this large amount of Christian European influence present in the area. Drake discusses religion as important to the development

²⁰ Richard B. Drake, *A History of Appalachia* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2004), 19-22

region due to the independence it provided the people as well as tradition and security.²¹

Christianity was and that remains a fixture in the region, and some scholars view it as an obstacle of the region, not unlike that of African American religious practices. John Gaventa discusses this dichotomy with an understanding of Appalachian resistance in churches, but also how churches are used as a tool for elite control over the powerless in the region.²² Gaventa's portrayal of Appalachian cultures and religious practices falls into fatalistic understandings of a region plagued with outside interests destroying the land, while also providing alternative conceptions of the region.

However, despite a history of oppression and powerlessness, Appalachian activism is alive and well. Well documented activist movements in Appalachian coalfields, community policy, and musical tradition are all addressed throughout the following chapters. Despite these many examples of activism, the problem that remains is the under acknowledgement or erasure of Black narratives that are pivotal to the diversity of the region, and a potential solidarity movement. Without a refined recognition of the struggles of race and class in the region, and the continual suffering of Black Appalachians, these movements only continue to ignore the ever-present problems of racial oppression. Stephen Fisher and Barbara Ellen Smith contend, however, that Appalachia is a diverse place of people and cultures, and with activism against capitalism beginning to become a norm with this oft- overlooked region, new avenues of solidarity between all Appalachians is beginning to manifest.²³ Therefore, the usual Appalachian stereotypes of backwardness and fatalism are misguided because these connections are lacking

²¹ Ibid.

²² John Gaventa, *Power and Powerlessness: Quiescence and Rebellion in an Appalachian Valley* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1982), 91-2, 254.

²³ Stephen L. Fisher and Barbara Ellen Smith, *Transforming Places: Lessons from Appalachia* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2012).

from the many analyses needed to truly understand the region.²⁴ These cacogenic understandings and depictions of Appalachia persist today in the form of books like *Hillbilly Elegy*, a New York Times bestseller and flag bearer for cultural inferiority in Appalachia. It is a part of this project to resist these narratives and uplift Black and all oppressed voices through a process of historical and political reckoning. Using the long history of the banjo and music within the region, this project reinforces the importance of the echoes of historical memory it provides.²⁵

Multiple, ever-changing identities and cultural traits exist despite the popular belief of a homogenous Appalachian fatalism. Fatalism is a chief concern within the scholarship regarding the region. Many scholars worry people's experiences are discounted, looked over, and even blamed for the problems that plague the region. There are variances and homogenous groups, but Appalachia does not have a single homogenous culture. It is of utmost importance to this project "that all of the varied stories get told; that all the many voices of Appalachia are heard, and that all urban and rural Appalachians have the power to participate in developing new and better visions for themselves, their families, and their communities."²⁶ Appalachia and the music of the region has been exploited, "picked apart and ruined just as surely as our forests and coal seams."²⁷ Notably, the underrepresented stories of Black people living in the region is of utmost importance and scholarship of the stories is extremely lacking. This is primarily due to smaller Black populations, but these histories as illustrated throughout the dissertation are as Appalachian as they are American. There are numerous scholars mentioned that focus directly on Black experience in Appalachia. Karida Brown, bell hooks, William H. Turner, Edward J.

²⁴ Phillip J. Obermiller and Michael E. Maloney, "The Uses and Misuses of Appalachian Culture," *Journal of Appalachian Studies* 22, no. 1 (Spring 2016), 104.

²⁵ Cecelia Conway, *African Banjo Echoes in Appalachia: A Study of Folk Traditions* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1995).

²⁶ Phillip J. Obermiller and Michael E. Maloney, "The Uses and Misuses of Appalachian Culture," 111.

²⁷ Rich Kirby, "Our Own Music," in *Colonialism In Modern America: The Appalachian Case*, ed. Helen Matthews Lewis, Linda Johnson, and Donald Askins (Boone: Appalachian State University, 2017), 230.

Cabbell, John Inscoc, among others discuss the cultural importance and experience of Blacks in Appalachia and how this absence within scholarship provides further proof of systemic racism in the region.

Like hip hop and other African American traditions, many Appalachian forms of music and traditions deal less with activism than themes of home and belonging. What is intriguing is how the music was taken from the people of the region, turned into an economic hotbed, and exploited. Protest songs against companies became the norm, although these protest songs were not well covered they made an impact within the community due to the music industries view of profit.²⁸ But the fallacy that the music of Appalachia is a “white” music completely ignores the influences Black banjo players and Native Americans had on banjo and string music commonly associated with Appalachian culture. Throughout, the circumstances of this exploitation are revealed in the development of the music industry. By separating groups and producing the musical genres of race and “hillbilly” or old-time music, the music industry began its mission of profit, racism, and exploitation that continues today. The history of the U.S. is one of segregation and racism and without recognition of these processes and narratives of Black Appalachians, solidarity is not possible.

The amount of exploitation in these histories is covered extensively in scholarship, what is not covered extensively is the various methods of resistance that occurs daily. The fatalistic attitudes of Appalachia exist today in scholarship largely because the narrative sells, and much like the Irish within Cedric Robinson’s work, Appalachians are made into a white “other.”²⁹ Robinson provides an understanding of Appalachia when he distinguishes that the Irish, much

²⁸ Kirby, “Our Own Music,” 237.

²⁹ Robinson, *Black Marxism*, 36-43.

like Appalachians were negated by the capitalist modes of production.³⁰ Thus, critical understandings of class and race are analyzed early on in this project. The argument in the region, becomes who can and does identify musically and culturally with Appalachia? How does capitalism infect and control narratives of solidarity in Appalachia? How can these repressed and underexamined Black histories become recognized and central to regional solidarity? What do these entanglements of class, race, and religion provide for a solidarity movement? The answers are multi-faceted and complicated, differing depending on circumstance, although Karl Miller provides an analysis of music as one of race, class and history that is pertinent to these questions.³¹ A history that leads to the further development of racial genres that exclude Black participation. Stephen Sweet notes how bluegrass music markets often create stereotypes of Appalachians as backward, overly religious, and strangely happy.³² Sweet contends that Appalachians suffer from this because songs that have activist sentiments never made it to the radio. The music industry does not market these messages today because it does not provide outsiders with the image they want.³³ What is contentious within music and regional scholarship of Appalachia, is not what is being heard, rather what is not and why that is the case. Much like Black histories in the region that are underrecognized, so are the many musical artists that exist in the region writing prominent protest ballads such as “Come All You Coal Miners.”

Consequently, bluegrass and country are contested genres fraught with diverse understandings of how this genre operates. Current dogmas of bluegrass reside in multifaceted networks of cultures, instruments, style, rhythm, and people.³⁴ Yet, bluegrass, in the minds of

³⁰ Ibid., 42

³¹ Karl Miller, *Segregating Sound*, 11.

³² Stephen Sweet, “Bluegrass Music and Its Misguided Representation of Appalachia,” *Popular Music and Society* 20, no. 3 (1996 Fall 1996): 37–51.

³³ Ibid., 40-5.

³⁴ Robert Cantwell, *Bluegrass Breakdown: The Making of the Old Southern Sound* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2003).

many, exists as one genre, one style, one people. Bluegrass roots are commercially conscious American folk traditions, rooted in Afro-American rhythm and influences, and minstrel performances. This raises problems of representation and the corporate development of the genre of bluegrass and country. Throughout the early twentieth century the music industries shift towards full commercialization and exclusion of Blacks in these genres became the status quo. There is a rich history of community and banjo echoes of African and white Appalachian cultures. But despite the efforts of Black artists to break into the music industry like Bessie Smith, Ray Charles, Jimmy “Swamp Dogg” Williams, Bill Livers, and early Black minstrels like Will Marion Cook, they were continually met with racist depictions of Black culture as criminal, ignorant, and unwanted. Robert Cantwell discusses these phenomena as “the ever-shifting frontiers of human understanding, where out of imitation, counterfeit, caricature, and burlesque...minstrelsy is the very image of life...shamelessly vulgar and incurably heroic...the happy conclusion of its own romantic dreams.”³⁵ Cecelia Conway’s work *African Banjo Echoes in Appalachia* provides a voice for the unheard stories of the banjo and presents the need to recognize these rich histories and hear the echoes.³⁶ Her work provides a pivotal understanding of the need for these histories banjo and Black oppression and expression throughout the region in order to accurately reckon with our past and move towards solidarity. The medium of bluegrass, old-time, and later country music does not define Appalachia, although well-known and native to the region, it does inform a familiarity, a heritage, nostalgia, and simultaneously popular culture’s view of the region. It is just a piece of the rich history and cultures that continue to exist in the hills. The stories that are hidden within the region and history of the

³⁵ Ibid., 274.

³⁶ Cecelia Conway, *African Banjo Echoes in Appalachia: A Study of Folk Traditions* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1995).

music industry need to be told and reckoned with to have more informed discussions of solidarity.

Appalachia is a predominantly white region, but harbors a rich cultural diversity from various European, Native American, and African backgrounds. Years of segregation, degradation, and political, social, and economic frustration have driven a cultural divide between Appalachia and the rest of the country, producing a frontier and scapegoat for current issues in the U.S.³⁷ The music heard from the region is one of tradition and history, but most music heard in Appalachia, like anywhere else, is not “white” music but a mixture of these many cultures and traditions. Deborah Thompson and Darrin Hacquard provide an understanding of how Appalachians identify themselves, and where the other invisible Appalachians exist through interviews with Black musicians in the region. The authors discover large populations of African Americans who do not identify with Appalachia and the traditional culture of the region, rather they identify more with religious associations, primarily Christianity, and music they play. This is largely because the development of the region and its traditions were founded under racist norms, emphasizing white superiority and Black invisibility.³⁸ The authors note that African American music traditions are an integral part of the current musical stylings heard in the region today. Yet, most African Americans have migrated out of the region due to oppression and violence, presenting a major problem of identification of culture, representation, ancestry, and racism.³⁹ Poignantly, this brings to light a difficult question of solidarity. Can people in places be united when they no longer want to be? The answer is far reaching and is not the focus of this

³⁷ Elizabeth Catte, *What You Are Getting Wrong about Appalachia* (Cleveland: Belt Publishing, 2018).

³⁸ Edward J. Cabbell, “Black Invisibility and Racism in Appalachia: An Informal Survey,” in *Blacks In Appalachia*, ed. Edward J. Cabbell and William H. Turner (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1985), 3–10.

³⁹ Deborah J. Thompson and Darrin Hacquard, “Region, Race, Representation: Observations from Interviews with African American Musicians in Appalachia,” *Journal of Appalachian Studies* 15, no. 1/2 (2009), 135-7.

project, but it gives credence to the belief that solidarity may not be possible in certain areas, but that does not mean scholars and activists should not try to provide avenues for solidarity.

Appalachian music is rich with folk tales of home and community, but also intertwined with a dark legacy of slavery and racism. The scholarship on Appalachia, much like the people, is rich, diverse, continuous, and ever changing. Problems in the region persist, as noted by Gaventa, because of troublesome companies, greed, and the lack of policy in community development found in other parts of the country.⁴⁰ Scholarship today presents itself towards an understanding of the complexities that exist in this wide region. Barbara Ellen Smith and Stephen Fisher's edited collection illuminates the activism in the region as continuous and evolving.⁴¹ They distinguish place and space as important to understanding how Appalachia is fighting back and transforming itself. Solidarity for them involves "contestation that is deeply complicated by not only political difference but also related dynamics of class, gender, race national origin, sexual identity, and other social divides."⁴² They argue for seeking to re-define these boxes of identification, yet these dynamics control divide and exhaust those who come up against them. It is difficult to think beyond capitalism, and both white and Black Appalachian communities have suffered greatly from capitalist greed and policy failures.⁴³ What the authors call for is a revisit of place based protests within the region through the rich songs, art, and religion that are fundamental to Appalachian life. These songs and narratives of Black Appalachian life "allow us to "sing across dark places' in these violent and tumultuous times,"

⁴⁰ Ronald D. Eller, "Modernization 1940-2000," in *High Mountains Rising: Appalachia in Time and Place*, ed. Richard A. Straw and H. Tyler Blethen (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2004), 197-220.

⁴¹ Stephen L. Fisher and Barbara Ellen Smith, *Transforming Places: Lessons from Appalachia* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2012).

⁴² *Ibid.*, 281.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 286-7.

there must be a vision forward to ward off racism and transform the environment to imagine a better one.⁴⁴

Henri Lefebvre theorizes on what these space politics look like, and how spatial production by the state shapes the world around us. Lefebvre, much like Smith and Fisher, understands that to have anti-capitalist and anti-racist mobilizations, there first needs to be a historical understanding of how they exist in the first place.⁴⁵ Lefebvre insists that inequalities placed on individuals is bound to be aggravated and controlled by the state creating a space of neo-liberal politics and capitalist exploitation.⁴⁶ What is left are individuals stuck in between a place (Appalachia) and a social space in which everyone exists. Smith and Fisher are concerned with Appalachian narratives of unity, while Lefebvre is more concerned with people more broadly and their impact on social outcomes. As Lefebvre indicates,

(Social) space is a (social) product. This proposition might appear to border on the tautologous, and hence on the obvious...Many people will find it hard to endorse the notion that space has taken on, within the present mode of production, within society as it actually is, a sort of reality of its own, a reality clearly distinct from, yet much like, those assumed in the same global process by commodities, money and capital...space thus produced also serves as a tool of thought and action; that in addition to being a means of production it is also a means of control, and hence domination, of power; yet that, as such, it escapes in part from those who would make use of it.⁴⁷

Thus, emphasizing the need for an understanding of space and place as it exists presently, and presenting a need for a collaborative effort within a place that seeks to occupy a social tool. Enabling this within the region of Appalachia, and particularly my hometown of Martinsville, Virginia, would help extinguish problems of solidarity, while at the same time create new problems of reach.

⁴⁴ Ibid., 287-8.

⁴⁵ Henri Lefebvre, *State, Space, World: Selected Essays* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2009), 40.

⁴⁶ Ibid., 181-2.

⁴⁷ Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space* (Hoboken: Blackwell Publishing, 1991), 26.

The counter narratives established above and throughout these works are pivotal in fighting back against the detrimental scholarship that exists of the region. Scholarship which establishes Appalachia as a fatalistic, impoverished, homogenous culture of ignorance needs to be disproven and old stories of Black expression and oppression can be used to unite and combat them.⁴⁸ What is redemptive about bluegrass and country music, and the cultures found within Appalachia are the diversity of meanings, the continuous creation of identity, and the activism that persists through groups such as the Highlander Center in Tennessee. If change is to occur in the region, race, class, and the history of it must be met with action and solidarity. Music industry interests may have taken bluegrass and country music into a more commercialized route, fracturing racial claims and communities, but a place and community still exists around it.⁴⁹ The interests of Appalachians echo throughout the U.S., much like the history of the banjo, these stories need to be told. Martinsville is important, not only because it is my home, but because it too shares these histories that must be reckoned with and reformed. Acknowledging and addressing the systemic racism found in the history of the city via the Martinsville Seven, along with an acknowledgement of the diverse musical and activist traditions that continue to exist, is in my view the only path to actual solidarity in the area. The questions that arise from this, is how the dynamics of local place politics can meet the needs of a unified social movement? What does this look like locally? Are there limitations to the reach of an Appalachian place politics even established at a spatial level? Would the people even want to exhaust themselves for this? Despite never fully answering these questions with historical

⁴⁸ See: Jack E. Weller, *Yesterday's People; Life in Contemporary Appalachia* (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 1965). J. D. Vance, *Hillbilly Elegy: A Memoir of a Family and Culture in Crisis* (New York: Harper Collins, 2016).

⁴⁹ Karl Miller, *Segregating Sound*.

examples and musical tracks, the object is to begin the process of developing more community centered policies and approaches that would enable solidarity.

If solidarity, is based on notions of shared suffering, this creates a false equivalency between Black and white experiences of oppression in Appalachia. So, I take a different approach to solidarity. Throughout this project, I directly address the historical oppression of Blacks in and outside the Appalachia region. I demonstrate that Black expression and experience are constantly met with violence, injustice, and economic, political, and social oppression. The problem is many whites in the region believe they are an oppressed minority, hindering chances of cross-racial solidarity because they have not acknowledged the role whiteness has in racial injustice.⁵⁰ Roseann Liu and Savannah Shange's work "Toward Thick Solidarity: Theorizing Empathy in Social Movements," discusses the phenomenon of thin solidarity, that is used in Appalachia to equate white and Black Appalachian oppression.⁵¹ To combat this, Liu and Shange propose a notion of 'thick' solidarity, "a kind of solidarity that mobilizes empathy in ways that do not gloss over difference, but rather pushes into the specificity, irreducibility, and incommensurability of racialized experiences."⁵² The primary goal of 'thick' solidarity is to establish that shared histories and similar events between groups of people ignore the different forms of exploitation that exist. Life chances under white supremacy are far different for whites than Blacks in Appalachia and anywhere else in the U.S.⁵³ Thus, Liu and Shange propose a responsible form of solidarity, one that empathizes with those who have been oppressed and enjoins a responsibility that "accounts for differential histories and political economies of state

⁵⁰ Barbara Ellen Smith, "De-Gradations of Whiteness: Appalachia and the Complexities of Race," *Journal of Appalachian Studies* 10, no. 1/2 (2004): 38–57.

⁵¹ Roseann Liu and Savannah Shange, "Toward Thick Solidarity: Theorizing Empathy in Social Justice Movements," *Radical History Review* 2018, no. 131 (May 1, 2018): 189–98.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 190.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 193-5.

violence.”⁵⁴ To have a ‘thick’ cross-racial solidarity there must be interpersonal empathy, historical awareness, political understanding, and “a willingness to be led by those most directly impacted.”⁵⁵

Responsible ‘thick’ cross-racial solidarity offers a new, broader way of thinking about activism in communities directly affected by racial injustice. In her work “‘Marking Whiteness’ for Cross-Racial Solidarity,” Greta Snyder argues that most whites believe Blacks are treated fairly in society. To address this, Snyder demonstrates that the racial injustices Blacks face require the development of cross-racial solidarity to achieve racial equity.⁵⁶ Although cross-racial solidarity is necessary, racial injustice against Blacks by whites prevents it. To create cross-racial solidarity, a responsibility of and a direct engagement with whiteness by whites must take place. Marking whiteness hyper-visible and demonstrating that it is integral to systemic racism will facilitate pathways to racial justice.⁵⁷ Snyder asserts that whites are unaware of racial inequality because they do not experience it, nor do they acknowledge whiteness as integral to creating racial injustice. To overcome this, difference must be addressed, public awareness of historical racial injustice by whites needs to occur, and whites must confront how their whiteness impacts the world around them.⁵⁸ Marking whiteness, for Snyder, can awaken whites to racial inequality, allowing them to see that the white lifeworld is flawed, and “embrace the idea that racial inequality is just as much “our” problem as it is “theirs.””⁵⁹ In sum, an anti-racist responsible ‘thick’ solidarity movement requires that whites first must acknowledge their whiteness and secondly recognize that whiteness “perpetuates racial oppression in its current

⁵⁴ Ibid., 195.

⁵⁵ Ibid., 196.

⁵⁶ Greta Snyder, “‘Marking Whiteness’ For Cross-Racial Solidarity,” *Du Bois Review: Social Science Research on Race* 12 (May 20, 2015): 297–319.

⁵⁷ Ibid., 299, 312.

⁵⁸ Ibid., 310-11.

⁵⁹ Ibid., 312.

form.”⁶⁰ Snyder suggests that pop culture can and does play a large role in alerting whites of their whiteness, as do the multiple strategies needed to achieve racial justice through cross-racial solidarity.⁶¹ But there are limits to what an artist can do, and how audiences interpret it, leaving the road to cross-racial solidarity filled with many problems and inconsistencies. The outcome, however, of racial justice and Black liberation through cross-racial solidarity is worth the endless effort it will take.

Thus, throughout this project I critically engage with how whiteness is constructed and how it is integral to the systemic reproduction of racial injustices. In chapter one I address the historical racial oppression Blacks face in Appalachia and throughout the U.S. To facilitate a cross-racial solidarity movement, I argue that it is necessary that whites in Appalachia reckon with and address their whiteness and the history of racial injustice against Blacks. Both chapters two and three address the racial injustice Blacks have faced in the musical industry, as well as how music has been a tool to bridge the divide of racial injustice. Despite the racial injustice, and white supremacy present in the music industry, a “thick” version of cross-racial solidarity can be facilitated if whites acknowledge their whiteness and acknowledge the narratives of racial oppression that exists in the songs they hear. Hip hop, bluegrass, and country music do not create cross-racial solidarity. Rather, they provide tools to enable recognition, awareness, difference, incommensurability, and racial justice in a cross-racial solidarity movement. Chapter four places these arguments in my hometown of Martinsville, Virginia, providing a historical account of racial injustice in the case of the Martinsville Seven. By addressing these problems at home and acknowledging the role racist white legal systems have in carrying out racial injustices, I argue that cross-racial solidarity can be achieved. It will take work and likely many iterations to truly

⁶⁰ Ibid., 313.

⁶¹ Ibid., 314-15.

instill a cross-racial, thick solidarity movement in Martinsville. But with a recognition of the history of racial injustice, role of difference, and recognition of whiteness, the struggle for racial justice and cross-racial solidarity might be possible.

Theoretical Paradigms of Hip hop, Appalachia, and Religion

Using Cecilia Conway's work *African Banjo Echoes*, and Nancy Love's work *Musical Democracy*, I argue that music allows for a better process of recognition regarding these histories.⁶² By enabling understandings of how music provides a place of expression and gets people moving, a musical democracy acts as an enabling factor for both this recognition and solidarity. Acknowledging the music that came before and will come after, all while telling the new and old stories that combat systemic racism and class oppression.

Race is a theme not covered by these theorists and is an important element to this project. Therefore, throughout, I rely on Robinson's critique of white hierarchical structures oppression of Black peoples. Robinson states that "a Black radical tradition formed in opposition to that (white) civilization and conscious of itself is one part of the solution" indicating the need for a conversation of colonized peoples and their struggle.⁶³ This for Robinson is the struggle African people around the world face continually. Colonialism has left out African people and treated them as "racial capital." I use this theory to explain the racial component of historical progression. I also place heavy emphasis on David Roediger and Barbara Ellen Smith's analysis of racism through class that has imbedded itself within the U.S., and particularly within Appalachia.

⁶² Nancy Sue Love, *Musical Democracy* (New York: State University of New York Press, 2006).

⁶³ Robinson, *Black Marxism*, 318.

Additionally, James Cone's theory of Black liberation theology is helpful for analyzing white theology within the region of Appalachia.⁶⁴ Cone's theory provides evidence of white Christian racism, which is against the teachings of Christ. Cone argues that Black liberation is God's liberation, because God is for the oppressed communities. The task of Black theology is a theology for the Black community to liberate themselves from the racist white theological practices. Cone helps explain how religious practices in the US have persisted to oppress Black people. As Cone states, "White theologians, not having felt the sting of oppression, will find it most difficult to criticize this nation, for the condemnation of America entails their own condemnation."⁶⁵ This theory informs the theoretical conception of white Christianity as practiced in the U.S. as problematic and racist, not one of love and kindness.

When discussing religion as a key concept and theme, I am not stating that religious practices are inherently oppressive or liberating. Throughout the dissertation, I address religion as a practice used, in varying degrees, in liberatory projects such as the Civil Rights Movement, as well as the way it enables racist religious oppression of enslaved Blacks. I address religion throughout because it is a connective tissue to everyday life, culture, and practice. It informs how music was and is produced. Throughout history, religion has been used to define people. Using the work of Talal Assad, this project engages religion as a process, and one that is ever-changing and different from place to place.⁶⁶ Religion for this project emphasizes the way in which so called religious practices differ from community to community and these knowledges and practices "cannot be understood independent of their historical relations with nonreligious symbols or of their articulations in and of social life, in which work and power are always

⁶⁴ James H. Cone, *A Black Theology of Liberation* (New York: Orbis Books, 1990).

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 21.

⁶⁶ Talal Assad, *Genealogies of Religion* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993), 30-1.

crucial.”⁶⁷ Religion is not a historically frozen ideology or institution, beliefs changed as the conditions around them changed.⁶⁸ I use religion throughout to demonstrate these various processes in historical accounts as well as the development of the music industry. Religion is used as a tool for musicians, elites, and everyone in between. Emphasized by Bill Monroe’s description of himself as not a religious man, in stark contrast to the Christian music he sang on records, radio, and at concerts.⁶⁹ Religion then, for this project, is concerned with how and why it is used, and what power mechanisms are utilized. Thus, music and religious practices is of great importance to this project.

Tricia Rose’s theory of hip hop is pivotal to this project, as it provides a theoretical background and approach to hip hop. Rose theorizes hip hop as a Black noise. She understands hip hop as a voice for those forgotten people, primarily Black, to describe and present their struggles to their community and the rest of the world, as well as their stories of everyday life.⁷⁰ Monica Miller’s theory of hip hop and religion builds upon the theory of hip hop presented by Rose as a resistive form of expression against Black racism.⁷¹ Miller analyzes religion and provides an understanding of how hip hop effects religion as opposed to how religion affects hip hop. Miller’s theory demonstrates that religion cannot describe hip hop, but rather it changes how we understand and define religion. This fits well with the argument of hip hop as transformative, and the constraints of knowledge production. Miller advocates, “Hip-hop cultural practices seemingly call religious ‘properness’ into question by challenging the very

⁶⁷ Ibid., 53.

⁶⁸ Ibid., 46-7.

⁶⁹ Cantwell, *Bluegrass Breakdown*, 29-30.

⁷⁰ Tricia Rose, *Black Noise: Rap Music and Black Culture in Contemporary America* (Hanover: Wesleyan University Press, 1994).

⁷¹ Monica R. Miller, *Religion and Hip Hop*.

epistemological structure by which our field of analysis is developed.”⁷² Miller analyzes how hip hop creates new understandings of what religion is, and how it operates in hip hop.

These theories along with the historical problems of race and class discussed help conceptualize how Appalachians, and in my case citizens of Martinsville, deal with trouble. Particularly, these theories illustrate how social constructs and institutions of both class and race restrain, separate, and isolate large groups of people from one another. Using theories of hip hop, recognition of historical processes, religion, race and class, and music, I propose that connections do exist across race and class boundaries throughout Appalachia. These theories provide connections among separated peoples through social activism based on the liberatory aspects of music and recognition of the race and class histories.

Methodology

In order collect data, I use interpretative methods, discourse analysis, empirical research, and auto-ethnography. I use these methods to understand the impact racism, corporate interests, and musical development had in the Appalachia region and the U.S. I gather empirical data through a dissection of the various musical historical ranging from early banjo music in the 1800s through alongside the literature, as well as placing myself in the region of Martinsville, Virginia. I use the case study of the Martinsville Seven to analyze how my theory can be best understood and utilized. This case study allows me to place the reader in my hometown and connect all the historical issues of race and class to a locale that is important to me, but also carries the weight of these problems. In doing so, I demonstrate the importance of reckoning with history, the impacts of these histories, and how it can be potentially overcome.

⁷² Ibid.,179.

My project employs some aspects of auto-ethnography. This places my experiences with the music and understandings of race and class. Although limited in its usage, primarily in chapter four, I find this method central because I, and the reader, can place oneself in the story being told. I view auto-ethnography as an integral part of my project because the human experience of music is integral, and it interweaves other methodologies providing a theoretical story of the liberatory aspects of theory, music, and difference. Auto-ethnography “provides the “anthropology of an individual and his or her relationship to these concepts”, thus providing parts of a story that are not told.⁷³ The goal of most music is to tell a story and relay a message from different groups about one's own experience with the problems they face and the truths they know. Auto-ethnography helps tell the stories of felt experience within the music and histories analyzed, providing my own account of doing the research and the affective nature that is required for the project. Describing these experiences and feelings as I listen to a song or describe my own past is useful for this project because it places me in the connective force that music and the theory of recognition provided by such analysis. Using auto-ethnography allows me to analyze how I reckon and acknowledge these racist histories, and how I choose to move forward. By describing others’ experience, “auto-ethnography does justice ‘to the importance of felt experience, and even to strange and hitherto excluded bodily and emotional sensations’ in the creation of knowledge.”⁷⁴ Similarly, Linda Tuhiwai Smith discusses the importance of methodology as it is constructed with indigenous people in mind.⁷⁵ This is not to say people from

⁷³ James B. Haile, “Good Kid, m.A.A.d City: Kendrick Lamar’s Autoethnographic Method,” *The Journal of Speculative Philosophy* 32, no. 3 (2018), 490.

⁷⁴ Audrey Reeves, “Auto-Ethnography and the Study of Affect and Emotion in World Politics: Investigating Security Discourses at London’s Imperial War Museum.,” in *Emotions in International Relations: Methodological Perspectives on the Emotional Turn*, ed. Maeva Clement and Eric Sangar (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017), 114.

⁷⁵ Linda Tuhiwai Smith, *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples* (London: Zed Books, 1999).

Appalachia are indigenous, but her work discusses reclaiming one's way of life and incentivizes connection between groups through social justice. I use Smith's work to help carefully discuss my own privilege and attempt to re-center it into how music serves as a vehicle for resistance and change.

Chapter Outline

To begin this project, chapter one provides the background of the systemic racism against Black people that exists in the U.S. and Appalachia. Throughout this chapter, I analyze the histories of slavery into current forms of racism such as police brutality and mass incarceration. I also demonstrate the role Appalachia played in these histories, especially the way in which whiteness has not been acknowledge. The development of racism through class is an important to note as it directly problematizes the history of anti- Blackness found in the U.S. and Appalachia. Perhaps most important is the understanding that to overcome these racist understanding Appalachia must acknowledge its own whiteness and allow the fractured Black voices of the mountains to speak their truth. An acknowledgment of these processes in the U.S. could lead to a solidarity movement that unites with movements such as the Black Lives Matter movement. I end this chapter with a look towards music to overcome these problems with the stories of those unheard.

The second chapter focuses on the development of music in Appalachia, and the formation of the music industry. Emphasizing the banjo as a tool for the region to come to terms with its racial past of slavery, oppression, and musical traditions I contend that new and unheard Black stories can finally be told. Examining the early origins of the banjo and its African origin, and the commercialization of it by whites in the 1800s through minstrelsy which later becomes

old-time or “hillbilly” music, reveals narratives forgotten. The echoes of the banjos reverberate throughout the newly created music industry which continually used racism and violence to ensure white supremacy in the genres. By separating Black and whites musically, the music industry successfully segregated sound, fractured history, and made it nearly impossible for Blacks to succeed in the genres they helped create. This chapter tracks the development of black-faced minstrelsy, Black musicians attempts to combat the racist depictions of them through music, the creation of race and “hillbilly” or old-time records, and the racist way country and bluegrass music developed. Above all else, this chapter reveals the racial institutions present in our state structures are also found in the development of country and bluegrass music. I end this chapter with an acknowledgement of Otis Taylor and Our Native Daughters who, like the Black banjo griots before them, play the banjo and provide the echoes of historical memory of racism and violence against Black people.

Chapter three focuses on how Black artists overcame the racist musical industry with an examination of the blues, jazz, soul, gospel, and rap and hip hop music. This chapter provides understandings through various musicians the ways in which Black musicians created new genres of music and continually reinvented their sound to played and heard. Despite the constant struggles of race and class oppression, these artists continued to write songs and protests systemic issues of racism. Providing the music for Civil Rights and Black liberation, the history of Black cultural music is one that emphasizes the way religion is used as a liberatory practice, but it demonstrates the way that music informed religion. Into the late 1970s and 80s, hip hop culture provides similar voices of resistance to racist structures of power. By providing a voice and avenues of expression hip hop, while existing within a neoliberal capitalist, provides resistance to oppressive racist policy and police brutality. Hip hop, which is now a worldwide

phenomenon, enables listeners all around the country to hear new histories and stories, and while some can and do promote racist commercial understandings of Black life, they also provide a voice for so many more through community projects and understandings of hip hop as a form of religion. I end this chapter with an analysis of hip hop's impact in Appalachia, and how it relates the problems found in many communities in the mountains. Whether that be prisons, drugs, race or class problems, these messages are prominent in Appalachia and provide a voice for many. Using the artist Gangstagrass as an example, I note how the combination of both bluegrass and country and hip hop styles provide linkages to the rich cross-cultural heritage found in Appalachia with lyrics that embrace and provide Black stories. Again, the need to reckon with the banjo echoes is imperative because the groundwork for solidarity is present in the region.

Lastly, I analyze the case of the Martinsville Seven. This case provides a connection to Martinsville and the need to reckon with these racial histories to move forward with a social movement that unites all people. This deeply troubling case that oversaw the legal execution of seven Black men, offers a look into past occurrences that continue today with the legal murder of Black people. This case emphasizes not only the need for bringing these stories and histories back into our conscious and learn from them. From this case I emphasize how music helps to bring an acknowledgement of these histories and tell new stories providing avenues for solidarity. By examining the role of space and place in music, I argue that Martinsville can become a beacon of hope for movements of solidarity. With local and community activism I provide potential pathways on how such a movement can exist within Martinsville and Appalachia. I end this chapter emphasizing the need to reckon with these oppressive histories, and to allow them to become central in our focus. We must listen to the banjo echoes to have solidarity, without the recognition of racism solidarity cannot exist and these struggles will

continue. To my friends and family, we have nothing to lose when we join those that suffer. As you read through this project, my plea and suggestion is to listen to the music discussed and come to your own conclusions as I have done.

Chapter 1: “The Meek Shall Inherit the Earth”: A Discourse on Racism and Appalachia

“You cannot change a society til’ you take responsibility for it”- Grace Lee Boggs

Introduction

Addressing issues such as police brutality, mass incarceration, musical traditions, and poverty in Appalachian and African American communities requires a close examination of the interwoven and frightening modalities of oppression hidden throughout history. This chapter introduces the reader to the history of racism and oppression in the region of Appalachia and in U.S. more broadly. Developing an understanding of this history provides a reason why a social movement, such as Black Lives Matter, and local narratives and religion, provide an account for many of the ongoing problems in Appalachia. Though different problems exist in different areas, as they do person to person anywhere, the problems in Appalachia are a continuation of ongoing race and class struggles that coexist in African American communities across the U.S. This chapter, and project, cannot fully address these points, but it presents a continual pattern of Black oppression in Appalachia.

The diversity of Appalachian residents, as well as the regions checkered racial past, illustrates many of the difficulties in overcoming race and class dynamics. However, it simultaneously promotes hope through these dynamics used to separate. Black and white lines are drawn throughout the region by color writers, historians, the music industry, and more importantly the citizens themselves. Color writers, often journalists or novelists, wrote hyperbolic, romanticized versions of the region, often depicting Appalachia as a simple, strange, and beautiful in the mid nineteenth century. They created an extremely popular understanding of

Appalachia as a land separated from modern understandings. Similarly, historians often described Appalachia through the lens of regional color writers, enforcing Appalachian stereotypes of laziness, simplicity, and backwards in academic works.¹ These narratives described the population as a simple homogenous group of people who are poor and needy, despite the diversity of the region and the protest against these harmful understandings that this chapter provides. This myth of Appalachian homogeneity and backwardness is addressed as a hinderance to not only a true representation of the area, but also as a structural barrier that prevents solidarity.

The plague of colonial racism has prevented a true solidarity movement, and it distinguished a cultural superiority, presenting itself as one of the sinister founding pillars of current U.S. hegemony. Historically speaking, the concept of race is complex. In the case of U.S. racial supremacy, it is the creation of “whiteness,” and the promotion of it, that degrades other humans as less, plunging the U.S. into further racial conflict. The identification of “whiteness”, as it relates to Blacks and Appalachians, is a central theme throughout this chapter. I argue that like other methods of colonialism, and slavery, “whiteness” is used to enact a fallacy of racial and cultural superiority, creating little space for solidarity. Enacting the racial identifier, “white,” places white people above all others, both racially and in class standing. These epochs were often upheld via violence and stringent policing, and although this chapter addresses the various Appalachian stereotypes, violence against African Americans persists in the region as it did throughout the U.S. due to the inability to reckon with the elusive concept of “whiteness.” Thus, leading to the main questions of this chapter: can solidarity exist in the face of continued racial

¹An example of this type of historiography is found in, Jack E. Weller, *Yesterday's People; Life in Contemporary Appalachia* (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 1965). Many other examples persist; however, these works tend to be the most popular in describing supposed Appalachian “inferiority.”

oppression? What can Appalachia do? Can a historical unpacking of these problems alleviate them? If not, what should the goal be?

To answer these questions, the first section of the chapter examines race and class within Appalachia connecting it to the rest of the U.S. as a construct of slavery and continued racial oppression in current times. This section focuses heavily on how race is constructed and continues to subjugate and oppress Black people. I explore first the history of Appalachia and the racial development of the region. I then focus on the establishment of slavery, post-slavery, convict leasing, religion, Jim Crow, and color blind constitutionalism. Therefore, I argue that the history of race is directly tied to the creation of white elite institutions and a legal code whose goal was terror and violence against “non-white” populations. Indicating a shift of focus from culture to race as an identifier.

The second section of the chapter examines how class is constructed within Appalachia, and more broadly the U.S. Additionally, it addresses how impoverished whites view themselves, and how it has led to the current discourses we know today. This section understands that class and race in the U.S. are interwoven and complicated processes that oppress Blacks, while never addressing the production of “whiteness.” A continuation of past legal policies emphasizes how such ideologies are created and why they persevere within the framework of a “free” state. I end the section by providing a framework on how class is a pivotal part of how and why violence against African Americans continues, and what is being done to combat that in Appalachia currently.

The final section serves as a springboard for the future. Emphasizing the role history and future planning can do to establish an understanding of whiteness and the need to acknowledge its role in racial oppression. I illustrate the devastation of the current U.S. racial discourse, while

also locating potential avenues of resistance. I argue that a solidarity project requires addressing and re-addressing the problems of race and class through both Afrofuturism and Afropessimist strategies. I conclude with the notion that music is of vital importance in remembering, reckoning, and healing from the wounds of oppression. These are points I return to in the remaining chapters of the project. I argue that, despite the race and class barriers constructed preventing it, music provides a tool for resistance and an archive of history to overcome oppression and unite people. Thus, the main goal of this chapter and project is to imagine new possibilities of solidarity and social justice.

An Examination of Race in Appalachia, U.S.A

The history of Appalachia is one of rich diversity and complex interactions enmeshed within the history of slavery and racism. The region of Appalachia covers West Virginia, eastern Kentucky, southwest Virginia, east Tennessee, western North Carolina, and northern Georgia.² This area is renowned and cherished by those who live there for its diverse peoples, traditions, and rolling hills. In contrast, Appalachia is known throughout the U.S. for its capital enterprises such as coal mining and textile production, false narratives of a homogeneous Anglo-Saxon heritage, and a formulated otherness. Appalachia has been described as “a peculiar and untamed corner of America” by those outside the region.³ A designed regional otherness based on malicious creations spawning ideas of complete separation and backwardness in the eyes of all, despite evidence that espouses the opposite.⁴ The most damaging perception of the region is the logic of

² Deborah McCauley, “Religion,” in *High Mountains Rising: Appalachia in Time and Place*, ed. Richard A. Straw and H. Tyler Blethen (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2004), 179–96, 187.

³ Elizabeth Catte, *What You Are Getting Wrong about Appalachia* (Cleveland: Belt Publishing, 2018), 37.

⁴ Henry D. Shapiro, *Appalachia on Our Mind: The Southern Mountains and Mountaineers in the American Consciousness, 1870-1920* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1986), Bruce Stewart, ed., *Blood in the Hills: A History of Violence in Appalachia* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2012), 2-3.

homogenizing the many distinct cultures in the region through one white cultural understanding.⁵ This modern understanding of Appalachia is not only false, but an examination of history quickly dispels harmful stereotypes as a continuation of white supremacy intent on division, and instead presents Appalachia as a reflection of American society. It is plagued with the same issues of class and racism, an issue many scholars fail to acknowledge.

Indications of white supremacy are based in fragile egos of historians and color writers in the 1800s who refused to view the region and the people as anything but “other.”⁶ Color writers epitomize whites’ conception of history being driven by narration.⁷ They narrate Appalachia as consisting of beautiful landscapes, a peculiar culture, otherness, and simplicity, romanticizing within the American conscious a different world from the one they live in. This obscures many of the important industrial enterprises that dilapidated the region and people.⁸ In 1964, LIFE magazine released an issue that describes the region as poor, simple, and different from the rest of the U.S. and in need of help.⁹ Peculiarly, only whites and images of poverty filled the story of a region in need of saving. The harmful understandings of historical poverty and backwardness in a region never acknowledge the rich cultural history, diversity, and affluence that also exists in Appalachia. Furthering these stereotypes and harmful imagery, the role of violence became a primary source for early twentieth century writers who proclaimed that genetic and cultural deficiency, along with isolation from civilization is to account for this assumed backwardness.¹⁰ The consensus on Appalachia had less to do with actual mountain living and more with color

⁵ Catte, *What You Are Getting Wrong about Appalachia*, 64-6.

⁶ Stewart, *Blood in the Hills*, 4-5.

⁷ White, *Content of The Form*, 24.

⁸ Ronald L. Lewis, “Industrialization,” in *High Mountains Rising: Appalachia in Time and Place*, ed. Richard A. Straw and H. Tyler Blethen (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2004), 59.

⁹ John Dominis, “The Valley of Poverty,” *LIFE*, 1964.

¹⁰ Stewart, *Blood in the Hills*, 6-8.

writers sculpting a backwards homogenized American culture that did not exist.¹¹ Appalachia became a canvas for a progression from “the old ways”, a place forgotten to time. The goal was to industrialize, profit, and correct and inundate Appalachians with an understanding of their otherness. Henry Shapiro’s masterful depiction of these fallacies in his work *Appalachia on Our Mind*, provides a vivid history of Appalachia as invented to establish difference. Appalachia is framed by writers, and scholars alike, via anecdotal evidence as violent, backwards, culturally inferior, and racially pure descendants from an older generation, despite the similarities in the region to modern American life.¹² It was this process of othering that Appalachia was invented to be saved by American industrialization. Through this complicated history, the muffled voices of Blacks begin to spring up as large players in the region. Although, Blacks have been historically ignored in Appalachia, they too help understand similar histories of race and oppression found in the U.S. The fabricated ideas of Appalachia as a separate America are far from the truth.

Throughout this chapter the exploitation of African Americans is noted as capital exploitation and a murder that knew no boundaries, and this section demonstrates that Appalachia is no exception to these processes. It is the violent instances of racism, class antagonisms, and in some cases race and class camaraderie that eludes many scholars understanding of Appalachian history. The oppression of white Appalachian residents is of importance to the larger picture of solidarity in Appalachia, and garners much of the focus, but of even more importance is the invisibility of Black racial oppression and murder that derides the claims of otherness from America. Thus, Appalachia is a mirror image of America, an epitome of the same conditions found throughout the country. Appalachia was a created product of

¹¹ Shapiro, *Appalachia on Our Mind*, 28-31.

¹² *Ibid.*, 100-22, 132.

America, not one outside of it. Many of the racist practices found in the U.S. are also found there. The goal of this section, is to establish Appalachia as a region like any other, demonstrate that the people in the region have suffered from lack of resources and development, and provide evidence that Appalachia is not a racially homogenous society. Unlike much of the country, however, Appalachia does foster emancipatory ideas regarding Blacks. Appalachia then is unique, not by the characteristics of a people, but the varied history of government oppression and the resistance to the “norms” placed upon the region.

The “problem” of a region

Appalachia is a region that is plagued with false narratives and misunderstandings as to why people in the mountains and surrounding area live a “different” lifestyle than the rest of America. An un-American way of living that, despite many efforts, reflects American life through rapid industrialization, racism, negligence towards the poor, and violence. Appalachia is a past tense of American exceptionalism, a supposed impoverished area that represents “‘out of time’ and out of step with any contemporary present, much less a progressive future.’”¹³ The origins of which are found in paternalistic benevolent work by Christian missionaries’ discovery of the region as one that needed God and modern development.

The hope of most Christian missionaries was to craft a unified national community, develop a following in the mountains, and educate the mountaineers. This was met with mixed results and hostility towards northern religious leaders in their efforts, and in order to achieve their main goal of southern converts they abandoned all Black interests in the region.¹⁴ Jonathan

¹³ Catte, *What You Are Getting Wrong about Appalachia* (quoting Elizabeth Engelhardt), 9.

¹⁴ Shapiro, *Appalachia on Our Mind*, 32-43. Deborah Vansau McCauley, *Appalachian Mountain Religion: A History* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1995).

Smith's work "Religion, Religions, Religious," provides a concurrent explanation of this phenomena that "natural religion privileged similarity, often expressed by claims of universality or innateness; the explanation of difference was chiefly historical, whether it emphasized progressive or degenerative processes."¹⁵ It is no surprise that northern protestant leaders chose to abandon all Black interest in favor of whites, because whites were considered American, and Blacks were viewed as a problem to be solved in the region through segregation and exclusion.¹⁶ Appalachian, under this construction, is understood as a white social, economic, and political problem, informed by color writers and missionaries fantastical depictions of the region as another world, in an endless attempt to "define the region and mark its boundaries."¹⁷ This conceptual otherness was in need of remedial action through denominational uplift as it threatened ideas of American homogeneity and the reason for religious work. The Christian churches supplanted any needs of the communities they presided over for their own, establishing a narrative "of the mountaineers' need lest their work lose its purpose."¹⁸ After 1890, the dominant understanding of Appalachia was a problem of degenerate life and a continually needy population.¹⁹ These understandings persist today in Appalachia, and they are often used as a scapegoat for wider issues of race and class that exist in the U.S. Blaming Appalachia for these problems, however, is a finely tuned historical mechanism for media pundits and policy makers alike.²⁰

¹⁵ Jonathan Z. Smith, "Religion, Religions, Religious," in *Critical Terms for Religious Studies*, ed. Mark C. Taylor (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1998), 269–84, 272.

¹⁶ Shapiro, *Appalachia on Our Mind*, 47-51.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 57, Emily Satterwhite, *Dear Appalachia: Readers, Identity, and Popular Fiction since 1878*, *Dear Appalachia* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2012), 3.

¹⁸ Shapiro, *Appalachia on Our Mind*, 61.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 63

²⁰ Elizabeth Catte, *What You Are Getting Wrong about Appalachia* (Cleveland: Belt Publishing, 2018).

The narratives of religious and cultural otherness were not accurate, as much like elsewhere in America, religion changes, people change, and life continues. The impetus that led missionaries to the mountains was to establish a genuine otherness and “fix the problem” of Appalachia. The “problems” of mountain churches and religion in the essay “Family, Religion and Colonialism in Central Appalachia”, emphasizes the organization or supposed lack of church organization outsiders used to colonize the region.²¹ Northern ministers found this as a drawback to the Appalachian church and thought services were inefficient to the cause of the church, which would not be able to profit from or make an indelible mark on “needy people.” Outsiders of the region judged how services were conducted and insisted that those attending should assimilate into modern society.²² Northern churches, missionaries, and folklorists aimed to describe “Appalachia off from America, and was thus an act of creation,” a creation that needs to be brought back to modernity.²³ The prominent theme amongst those outside of Appalachia was the isolation of the region, creating difference in class status among the residents and outsiders. Establishing this narrative of isolation could not adequately define mountain life nor explain it, but it could create difference and a reason to occupy the land.²⁴

As any other project of othering these attempts to explain and define what Appalachia is, they themselves must confront the idea of progress, which is a product of American life.²⁵ For writers and academics, Appalachia is a backwards region in contrast to modern American towns and cities. These notions are inherently false and skewed, as in many ways Appalachia reflected

²¹ Helen Matthews Lewis, Sue Easterling Kobak, and Linda Johnson, “Family, Religion and Colonialism in Central Appalachia,” in *Colonialism In Modern America: The Appalachian Case*, ed. Helen Matthews Lewis, Linda Johnson, and Don Askins (Boone: Appalachian State University, 2017), 113–40, 129.

²² *Ibid.*, 129.

²³ Shapiro, *Appalachia on Our Mind*, 77.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 81.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 84.

modern America. Whether it be violence, or industrialization, Appalachia is like the many places it was compared to throughout the United States. The idiosyncracies that exist in the region, are simply nuances of the region, just as certain ways of life exist in California or New York. Delicate ways of life and understandings exist around the country because culture is never truly homogenous and is often influenced by a multitude of factors. Color writers, establishing Appalachia as endlessly different and in need of reform, gave themselves control over what needed to be done in Appalachia.²⁶ The “reforms” in question targeted the capital control of the land, access to the resources, and a needy people with limitless resources that needed modernized systems of capital accumulation.²⁷ Economic modernization in the early 1900s, and repeated descriptions of Appalachia as a poverty-stricken population in need of saving, mirrored the mantra of religious missionaries’ decades earlier. Interestingly, Appalachia was not unfamiliar with resource extraction, and in fact much of the timber business and railroads running through the region in the 1850s onward provided many with jobs and the rest of the country natural resources.²⁸ Pillaging of natural resources and ridding of many of the natural beauties in Appalachia, is the continuation of the relationship corporations and capital interests have with the region. A method of complete destruction, and when the resources dried up so did the corporations, leaving behind an environmental and impoverished wasteland that once stood in beauty.²⁹

The threat of difference led to more paternalistic industrial pursuits, as in 1906, the cotton industry exploited children and mountaineers in the region. When these actions came

²⁶ Ibid., 120-31.

²⁷ Ibid., 156.

²⁸ Ibid., 160, See John C. Inscoe, ed., *Appalachians and Race: The Mountain South from Slavery to Segregation* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2001).

²⁹ Ronald L. Lewis, *Transforming the Appalachian Countryside: Railroads, Deforestation, and Social Change in West Virginia, 1880-1920* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2000).

under fire, they changed their position from one of industrial development to one of paternalism.³⁰ Appalachia had become an industrial scapegoat, in which companies accused the region of being degraded and in need of saving through labor, which they so graciously provided.³¹ Ronald Eller establishes in his work *Uneven Ground: Appalachia since 1945*, that this capitalist greed of industrialization further cemented the role of Appalachian otherness, as the land and life for those inhabiting the region changed forever.³²

No one in the region had a voice, as outside elites guarded their profits from those who worked for them. This pattern of extraction and paternalistic wielding of a supposed “othered” culture led to loss of land and identity. As John Gaventa specifies in his work *Power and Powerlessness: Quiescence and Rebellion in an Appalachian Valley*, “since the colonization of these rural valleys by industrial capital in the late 1800s, the ownership of the land has been separated from the people who live and depend upon it.”³³ By 1912, Appalachia was defined by the demographics of the people who still lived in the region, the poverty caused by industrialization, the lack of resources to combat the issues, and a lack of education and healthcare.³⁴ Because of this, more benevolent work spread throughout the region, with an incentive to educate and provide necessary resources. This benevolent work, however, much like the missionaries in the 1800s, understood Appalachia as a homogenous group of people, and therefore any work they did only aimed to continue difference and peculiarity with a focus only on impoverished whites.³⁵ Today books like *Hillbilly Elegy* continue to blame Appalachian

³⁰ Shapiro, *Appalachia on Our Mind*, 163-74.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 180-85.

³² Ronald D. Eller, *Uneven Ground: Appalachia Since 1945* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2008).

³³ John Gaventa, *Power and Powerlessness: Quiescence and Rebellion in an Appalachian Valley* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1982), 205.

³⁴ Shapiro, *Appalachia on Our Mind*, 187.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 214.

culture as problematic and inferior to the rest of the U.S. Contrary to this, the discovery of Appalachian folklore became of great importance for its marketability.³⁶ People could purchase a piece of Appalachia through music, dance, and crafts, establishing a new economic market for many areas in Appalachia. Most of which is supplied by women with little to no job opportunities in the area, creating an even more complex and gendered understanding of an economically marginalized Appalachia then previously understood.³⁷ New traditions of the southern mountains emerging, however, could not alter the view of Appalachia as an incomplete version of America. This is evidence that the long ingrained understandings of backwardness could not change with marketing. Appalachia, for most, retained its otherness because it lacked institutions found elsewhere in the country, as “folktales, superstitions, curious agricultural practices, peculiarities of speech, and the persistence of a “ballad” tradition appear as further evidence of Appalachia’s incompleteness.”³⁸ Appalachia is understood as a primitive America, distinct from the rest of the country, and as a symbol of otherness.

The defining characteristics of Appalachia for Cecil Sharpe is a folk tradition that separated Appalachia from America. Appalachians, for Sharpe, can be perceived as a race of people, a group, one that was still white, and yet different and less than.³⁹ This myth of Appalachia persists in modern thinking, leading to troubling conclusions about race, and Eller distinguishes that the region is a product of heavy industrialization that poisoned the people and

³⁶ Jane S. Becker, *Selling Tradition: Appalachia and the Construction of an American Folk, 1930-1940* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2000).

³⁷ Ann M. Oberhauser, Amy Pratt, and Anne-Marie Turnage, “Unraveling Appalachia’s Rural Economy: The Case of a Flexible Manufacturing Network,” *Journal of Appalachian Studies* 7, no. 1 (2001): 19–45.

³⁸ Shapiro, *Appalachia on Our Mind*, 246.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 256-64. John R. Gold and George Revill, “Gathering the Voices of the People? Cecil Sharp, Cultural Hybridity, and the Folk Music of Appalachia,” *GeoJournal* 65, no. 1–2 (February 2006): 55–66. Cecil J. Sharp, *English Folk Songs from the Southern Appalachians, Vol 1*, ed. Maud Karpeles (1932; Northfield, MN: Loomis House Press, 2012).

distinguishes Appalachia as other. This industrialization was realized during the War on Poverty and Appalachian Regional Development Act in the 1960s and beyond. Ultimately, faith in these growth based plans only exacerbated problems in the region, as those with little lose what they have and all profits and resources went to elites and outside corporations.⁴⁰ After World War II, most of the younger generation left the area in search of better opportunities outside the region. Many left their farms to go into cities for mainstream economic opportunities. Paul Salstrom indicates that between 1940 and 1960, “the net migration away from Appalachia was 1.7 million people.”⁴¹ The mechanization of coal mining, loss of farmland, unemployment, welfare dependence, and poor education and housing made it an easy decision to leave if the opportunity arose.⁴² In fact, the housing condition was so poor in the 1960 census that “at least 26 percent of Appalachian homes surveyed needed ‘major repairs,’ and 7.5 percent were in such a dilapidated condition that they endangered the health and safety of the families.”⁴³ The programs enacted to help in the 1950s choked out regional businesses and fed a political dependence on these funds due to external company dependence and lack of public programs.⁴⁴ The funds received ultimately continued the plight of big business in the mountains, maintaining the otherness and the mantra of underdevelopment placed on the region.⁴⁵ In 1957, the Kentucky Department of Development Council was established to oversee emergency protections in the area, such as flooding which burdens many in the region. This committee was chaired by a coal operator, four

⁴⁰ Eller, *Uneven Ground*, 7-15.

⁴¹ Paul Salstrom, “The Great Depression,” in *High Mountains Rising: Appalachia in Time and Place*, ed. Richard A. Straw and H. Tyler Blethen (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2004), 83.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 27-32. Harry K. Schwarzweller, *Mountain Families in Transition: A Case Study of Appalachian Migration* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1971). Richard B. Drake, *A History of Appalachia* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2004), 186-90. Philip J. Obermiller, “Migration,” in *High Mountains Rising: Appalachia in Time and Place*, ed. Richard A. Straw and H. Tyler Blethen (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2004), 94-5.

⁴³ Eller, *Uneven Ground*, 32.

⁴⁴ Drake, *A History of Appalachia*, 172-8.

⁴⁵ Eller, *Uneven Ground*, 35.

coal representatives, and four oil and gas industries, among a few others. This group had two-hundred member citizens, but the committee was dominated by industrial interests.⁴⁶ During the early 1960s, the top two producers of coal in Appalachia were purchased by Occidental Oil and Continental Oil, both large fossil fuel conglomerates. Massive outside energy corporations took over most Appalachian mineral rights and consolidated the outside control of Appalachian resources and interests.⁴⁷

In 1961, the Area Redevelopment Administration was created, and it would receive \$394 million dollars to aid the region. This plan followed a trickle-down approach to the region, most of money went to businesses and it did not help individuals and the socio-economic and political problems they faced in the region.⁴⁸ The bulk of this money that went to businesses, went to giant private companies that controlled and exploited the region. The issues of healthcare, education, and other development needs continued to be underfunded in favor of benefitting the extremely wealthy. These administrations continued to establish Appalachia as a different society in need of aid, and a media spectacle that examined the supposed “cultural degeneracy,” despite never attempting to help the citizens in the region.⁴⁹ The region, was once again at the center of American interest, making its way in John Kennedy and Lyndon Johnson’s presidential campaigns. Appalachia needed to be ‘fixed’ to uphold the false narrative of an affluent society. To do this, Lyndon Johnson’s enacted a ‘War on Poverty’ in 1964, and the implementation of federal funds to stimulate the Appalachian economy garnered mixed results. The Economic Opportunity Act enacted in 1964, and the Appalachian Regional Commission enacted in 1965,

⁴⁶ Ibid., 47.

⁴⁷ Drake, *A History of Appalachia*, 203.

⁴⁸ Eller, *Uneven Ground*, 59.

⁴⁹ Ibid., 66.

provided funding and community based poverty work that did not accomplish its goals.⁵⁰ The theory in Washington was to give Appalachians work and this alone would pull the economy up, ignoring the current power structures and systemic oppression that had placed many in crippling poverty. Consequently, in 1965, President Johnson enacted the Law Enforcement Assistance act, targeting urban areas, beginning a war not just on poverty but also African Americans.⁵¹ These programs launched by the U.S. government did little to address the political bargaining power of the citizens, and once more, the power dynamics of the poor became irrelevant if jobs or industry were present.⁵² The War on Poverty provided funding for many education and job programs in the region, that ironically pressed for growth and job training despite the need for a drastic societal change.⁵³ Although reform groups from the War on Poverty remain in the region, the political and economic impact the War on Poverty had in Appalachia was minor.⁵⁴ Richard Drake surmises that politically these programs were a failure as the 1968 election saw Richard Nixon carry all but one Appalachian state. Establishment politicians in the state resisted radical changes from groups concerned with political and economic democracy and ensured a mantra of Republican leadership and plutocratic tendencies in the region.⁵⁵ In short, Appalachian natural resources continue to be pillaged by elite interests while the citizens suffered from the immense wealth outsiders gained.⁵⁶

⁵⁰ Drake, *A History of Appalachia*, 174-7.

⁵¹ Elizabeth Hinton, *From the War on Poverty to the War on Crime: The Making of Mass Incarceration in America*, 1st edition (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2016).

⁵² Eller, *Uneven Ground*, 99.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 123.

⁵⁴ Drake, *A History of Appalachia*, 178.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 180-2.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 181. Stephen Fisher, ed., *Fighting Back in Appalachia: Traditions of Resistance and Change* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1993).

These programs continued the long held belief of cultural assimilation, and the belief that by providing jobs and resources, the disease of poverty would cure itself in the mountains. Appalachia was an American colony that can only be freed through community action. The paradox of poverty in a rich land can only be solved in Appalachia through community based activism. Many community leaders in Appalachia agreed the challenge “was to facilitate this change by organizing citizens locally around specific community concerns-political participation, health care, and welfare rights, access to housing and education, and property rights-and to build a regional identity and regional alliances around shared regional issues.”⁵⁷ The War on Poverty failed to alleviate any of the problems Appalachian residents faced, as coal companies and those who controlled the resources continued to oppress those that did not. In sum, economic development came at the expense of the poor, and it provided no rescue from the problems they faced. It was easier to remove mountains and poison people’s livelihoods, than address the structural political and economic issues prevalent in the region. Capital accumulation, not the eradication of injustice, remained the goal for outside interests. Of over twenty million acres of land surveyed in Appalachia, 40 percent were controlled by large corporations, who also controlled over 70 percent of the mineral rights.⁵⁸ Around the 1980s, globalization was beginning to take hold in Appalachia, as highways and commercial stores were spreading throughout the mountains. The rural residents, however, were farther removed from the gains of larger more urban areas. Many regions still lacked the ability to compete in the faster pace economy such as Southwest Virginia which averaged a twenty percent unemployment rate.⁵⁹ President Bill Clinton remarked that the region needed private and government investment

⁵⁷ Eller, *Uneven Ground*, 137.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 199.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 203-13.

to develop, a strategy that never worked, and rather than investing in the people, the money and the power would go elsewhere.⁶⁰

Appalachia has been an area of conquest for the U.S. government since its creation in the late 1800s. Despite this, however, many voices within Appalachia are never discussed or heard from. The Black voices in Appalachia have had little to no voice in creating their own identity in the region, it has largely been unresolved, under studied, and usually misunderstood as nonexistent. Remarkably, many prominent Black leaders come from Appalachian childhoods including bell hooks.⁶¹ The same racial problems that exist in America exist throughout the mountains, although racial relations in the region have been muted with a similar color-blind rhetoric of “holy Appalachia.”⁶² This belief that Appalachia is above racism and that it never existed in the mountains, is far from the truth of the region. Appalachia is real, much like America is real, but the myths surrounding it are harmful, not just to those outside the region but to those inside the region who suffer from it. By telling the gruesome unheard narratives and building new imaginaries of powerlessness, can new movements flourish and those unheard voices are made more prominent. While white Appalachian communities were receiving large amounts of money to save them, Black communities were left to further disintegrate under the social injustices they faced for hundreds of years. This occurred not just outside of Appalachia but also inside of it.

⁶⁰ Ibid., 220.

⁶¹ Drake, *A History of Appalachia*, 186.

⁶² Catte, *What You Are Getting Wrong about Appalachia*, 124-5.

Racism and Resistance in the Mountains: “Black people in White skins”

Often when reading historical accounts, historians omit minor details that make the narrative more consumable and ultimately do not affect the outcome of the research. In Appalachian history, as outlined throughout, those writing about the region omit critical details that would upend their research or beliefs of the backwardness of Appalachia. As Shapiro, Elizabeth Catte, John Inscoe, and others indicate, Appalachia is a creation by those who sought out difference. The “problems” they found were not new to America, rather, they explained America. A creation that continually omitted Black voices and refused to acknowledge the existence of Blacks in Appalachia or elsewhere.

The issue of racism, slavery, and the problems that come from has seemed to escape Appalachians historians’ field of view, and only within the past thirty years has the issue even been examined. Even still, African American history in the region is largely forgotten and underdeveloped compared to the narratives of the white mountaineers, coal miners, and poverty that saturate the current understanding of the region. Blacks are in all ways a minority population in Appalachia, a small percentage within the myth of a fully white society. A little over a million Blacks live in Appalachia and their presence was never inconsequential, as they provide clearer more amplified stories of the poor economic, political, and social conditions present in the region. Their invisibility in government programs and scholarly work demonstrates that there is little effort to help an oppressed population in depressed communities. Black Appalachians suffer far worse economic and political problems than their fellow white counterparts, although all attention has been focused on the problem of white poverty, because government programs

and funding view whites as worth saving.⁶³ The lack of interest, or rather, the complete unawareness of the plight of Black Appalachians provides further evidence of historical oppression via political (in)visibility. The horrors of slavery and continued racial oppression was not simply forgotten in the mountains, it was erased.

Ideas of a pure Appalachia free of racism, is wrought with historical inaccuracy and erasure. Throughout Appalachia, slavery was present, albeit to a much smaller degree. Richard Drake discusses this in his work “Slavery and Antislavery in Appalachia”, illustrating the horrors of slave auctions in the southern mountains that separated mothers from sons.⁶⁴ Of course, there were anti-slavery movements found all throughout the mountains before 1830, and it was largely these mountain societies, not the north, that harvested anti-slavery rhetoric. The majority of the mountain population, especially Tennessee and western Virginia, practiced anti-slavery throughout the 1800s with Samuel Doak and other Presbyterian church ministers founding institutions that educated this message of antislavery.⁶⁵ Consequently, this does not mean slavery and racism did not exist in the region, as by the 1850s anti-slavery rhetoric was virtually silenced or driven out by slave apologists in an effort to mimic the Antebellum South economic structure.⁶⁶ Despite the continual attack of Black and white Appalachians as dumb, and lazy, white Appalachians were given government attention and assistance. Albeit that assistance, as demonstrated, did very little to correct the social and political structures causing the problems, enabling poverty and dissent to grow. Whites and Blacks across the country were viewed as completely different, but especially in Appalachia. Blacks are always invisible in a national

⁶³Edward J. Cabbell, “Black Invisibility and Racism in Appalachia: An Informal Survey,” in *Blacks In Appalachia*, ed. Edward J. Cabbell and William H. Turner (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1985), 3–10, 3-4.

⁶⁴ Richard B. Drake, “Slavery and Antislavery in Appalachia,” in *Appalachians and Race: The Mountain South from Slavery to Segregation*, ed. John C. Inscoe (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2001), 16–26, 17-20.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 22-3.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 24-5.

white supremacist agenda compared to impoverished whites, who although are helped in minor ways are at least helped. James Klotter depicts the ways in which Blacks, with similar needs to their white counterparts, were turned away by reformers because needy whites in Appalachia took precedence over Blacks. Importantly, “not only did late nineteenth-century racism hinder black advancement, but so too did the increased dilution of white efforts by this alternative reform... these highlanders had been, after all, only black people in white skins.”⁶⁷

Blacks were only worth mentioning in the region when profit or slavery are involved. Kenneth Noe illustrates after abolitionists were silenced in the region, the development of railroads through southwest Virginia in the 1850s provided a source of revenue and trade.⁶⁸ The railroad needed labor and incentivized the leasing of slaves from slave owners in the area. Slaveowners and railroad companies alike profited off cheap unskilled labor, making deals between the two simple and painless. Slave labor became the primary mode for the construction of railroads in Appalachia, which “by 1856, 435 of the railroad’s 643 workers were hired slaves...it was black Southwest Virginians who made the dream of a mountain railroad a reality.”⁶⁹ Cotton production, likely due to the railroads, exploded throughout the lower South usurping thousands of enslaved Blacks down to plantations throughout Louisiana, Mississippi, and Alabama. Southern Appalachia was at the heart of slave trading in the South, with both white residents and slave owners profiting.⁷⁰ Most of the gains made directly from slave trading

⁶⁷ James C. Klotter, “The Black South and White Appalachia,” in *Blacks in Appalachia*, ed. William H. Turner and Edward J. Cabbell (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1985), 51–67, 62.

⁶⁸ Kenneth W. Noe, “A Source of Great Economy? The Railroad and Slavery’s Expansion in Southwest Virginia,” in *Appalachians and Race: The Mountain South from Slavery to Segregation*, ed. John C. Insoe (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2001), 101–15, 108–10.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 110.

⁷⁰ Wilma Dunaway, “Put in Master’s Pocket: Cotton Expansion and Interstate Slave Trading in the Mountain South,” in *Appalachians and Race: The Mountain South from Slavery to Segregation*, ed. John C. Insoe (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2001), 116–32, 117–23.

were local elites, but poor residents benefitted in many ways including selling slave children, guarding prisons that held slaves, trafficking slaves, and kidnapping free Black men in order to sell them back to their slave owners.⁷¹ Black men and women feared for their lives in the mountains, for at any moment they could be kidnapped and sold away from their families.⁷²

Emancipation for Blacks in Appalachia was largely spent in the prison labor system prominent in Appalachian coal mines from harsh sentences for petty crimes such as loitering. Harsh prison sentences and the promise of triple the profit it took to run the prison, created an industry built on the backs of Black men. The prison labor system in Appalachia is like those found throughout the U.S., garnering extremely high jail populations and death rates of Black prisoners.⁷³ Justified by the political myths that aimed to define Black people as lazy and criminal, these systems' aim was to ensure both profit and white supremacy in the region. Protests of these sentences did occur, but most were aimed towards white workers and prisoners, a minority, who were trapped in this treacherous system.⁷⁴ Blacks were left to cope for themselves in prison labor camps, away from their families, stripped of their humanity, and likely never to see freedom again. James Anox, a Black man and pivotal figure for prison labor protests and activists in West Virginia, was murdered a week after his arrest in the mines after being whipped to his knees, dragged out, and thrown in a vat, where he later died of shock. Anox had been imprisoned for forging a thirty-dollar check, and all involved in his death were acquitted.⁷⁵ Violence against Black people is a regular occurrence in the U.S., but rarely are the

⁷¹ Ibid., 126-28.

⁷² Ibid., 128-30.

⁷³ Ronald L. Lewis, "African American Convicts in the Coal Mines of Southern Appalachia," in *Appalachians and Race: The Mountain South from Slavery to Segregation*, ed. John C. Inscoe (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2001), 259-83, 271-74.

⁷⁴ Ibid., 266.

⁷⁵ Ibid., 278.

stories of this in Appalachia told or heard. Drake notes, that despite the misconceptions of ‘good’ race relations, during Jim Crow, “some 125 blacks were lynched in the region, and the many examples of ‘racial cleansing’... left a legacy of racism and fear.”⁷⁶ One of these stories takes place in Roanoke, Virginia, a blossoming city in late nineteenth century Southwest Virginia. The city of Roanoke serves as a reflection of Appalachia as America.

In 1890s Roanoke, white northern elites controlled much of the industry in the area, while the working class was largely made up of poor white natives and migrants. African Americans, a third of residents in Roanoke, lived in separate sections of the city as their white counterparts. Class and racial dynamics deeply divided the town, as African American men made up half of all arrests for petty crimes, and white citizens often called for the lynching of Blacks to solidify a white social and political order.⁷⁷ On February 9th 1892, William Lavender was accused of assaulting a white girl, leading to his lynching by a white mob that the newspaper described as “respectable.”⁷⁸ Jurors met and determined that they could not convict anyone of the crime, and throughout 1892 lynching threats continued towards Black men for no other reason than the color of their skin.⁷⁹ These events of the Roanoke race riots culminated on September 20, 1893, amid the rising tensions against Black residents by white residents, in the accusation that Thomas Smith, a Black man, robbed and beat a local white woman named Sallie Bishop.⁸⁰ Shortly after his arrest, a mob formed around the jail. Smith was assuredly innocent, as he claims that any man would rob and beat a white woman while remaining in the area for over a half an hour

⁷⁶ Drake, *A History of Appalachia*, 186.

⁷⁷ Rand Dotson, “Race and Violence in Urbanizing Appalachia: The Roanoke Riot of 1893,” in *Blood in the Hills: A History of Violence in Appalachia*, ed. Bruce E. Stewart (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2012), 237–71, 239–241. Ann Field Alexander, “‘Like an Evil Wind’: The Roanoke Riot of 1893 and the Lynching of Thomas Smith,” *The Virginia Magazine of History and Biography* 100, no. 2 (1992): 173–206.

⁷⁸ Ann Field Alexander, “‘Like an Evil Wind’: The Roanoke Riot of 1893 and the Lynching of Thomas Smith,” 180.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 181–2.

⁸⁰ Rand Dotson, “Race and Violence in Urbanizing Appalachia: The Roanoke Riot of 1893,” 240–2.

seemed very unlikely.⁸¹ Henry Trout, the current mayor of Roanoke, vowed to protect Smith, and as the mobs grew larger he called upon the local militia to protect the jail. At around eight o'clock that night, the mob, and militia fired over two-hundred shots at one another, killing several and wounding many more. This created a mob frenzy culminating in ransacking city official's homes looking for both Smith and Trout. The police chief seeing this mob destroy his home, decided to hand Smith, an innocent man, over to a lynch mob that not only lynched Smith, but riddled him with bullets.⁸² The next day the mob returned to cut off pieces of clothing and flesh as a trophy for their kill, dragging Smith through the street, and later burning his body.⁸³ Those responsible for the mob and lynching were only charged with a misdemeanor, serving less than thirty days of a one year sentence for the brutal murder of an innocent man.⁸⁴ Haunt tales of this lynching remain in Roanoke today, however, they are somewhat gutted of their original context and history. The most comprehensive piece of history on public sentiment of the lynching is found in a ballad written to the tune of the popular British ballad "Barbara Alen."⁸⁵ The ballad depicts city officials as murderers of innocent white citizens, mourning those killed, and "enshrine[ing] lynchers...remind[ing] Blacks of their subservient and precarious position in society."⁸⁶ Smith, a much forgotten man in the annals of history, was one of twelve Blacks lynched in Virginia that year, and one of over a hundred in the South, marking a continuation of white extralegal violence in the U.S. against Blacks.⁸⁷

⁸¹ Ibid., 243.

⁸² Ibid., 249-53.

⁸³ Ibid., 255-7.

⁸⁴ Ibid., 258.

⁸⁵ Ibid., 259-60.

⁸⁶ Ibid., 261.

⁸⁷ Ibid., 262.

Some twenty years later, the murder and lynching of a Black man named Brodus Miller, indicates once more Black invisibility and criminality in the U.S., and the carnival of Black death.⁸⁸ Gladys Kincaid, a white woman, was returning from work on June 21, 1927 in Morganton, North Carolina, when her neighbors stopped to alert her they had seen a strange Black man wandering around the place. Eager to get home, Kincaid insisted she must leave to cook dinner. When her mother returned, Kincaid was not home and was later found by her brother a few hundred yards away with a crushed skull from an iron pipe.⁸⁹ Miller was quickly identified as the killer by the police, and news of this spread quickly, with armed citizens looking for the suspect, putting all Black men in danger of being killed by the angry mob. Reported sightings of Miller were circulated throughout the town, claiming he had traveled Northwest in the mountains of North Carolina, initiating the largest manhunt in North Carolina history.⁹⁰ Many Black men in surrounding counties had been arrested by local police as suspects, furthering the idea of criminality and lack of rights awarded to Blacks.⁹¹ On July 3rd, Miller was spotted in Ashford, North Carolina pillaging for food. Commodore Burleson, after searching the woods, shot, and killed Broadus Miller. Eager to claim the reward, Burleson and his companions tied Miller up and drug into town in his car, dropping it on the ground near the courthouse for all to see as if he were a circus event.⁹² Local newspapers in Winston-Salem, North Carolina played on stereotypes of violent mountain people, continually accusing those that lived less than sixty miles of themselves of being degenerate. Journalists quickly distanced themselves from Morganton, emphasizing that they were the violent hillbillies, not the citizens of Winston-

⁸⁸ Kevin Young, "The Largest Manhunt in Western North Carolina's History," in *Blood in the Hills: A History of Violence in Appalachia*, ed. Bruce E. Stewart (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2012), 340–79.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 347.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 350-355.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 351.

⁹² *Ibid.*, 358-60.

Salem.⁹³ Miller's case is among many in the long history of racial oppression and violence against Black people in the U.S., that is rarely discussed or analyzed as a method of racial oppression.⁹⁴ Black victims of injustice are only remembered briefly in ballads and songs that romanticizes their death, and otherwise forgotten by most. This continues today, with the continual murder of Africans Americans by law enforcement and legal institutions, and the lack of justice for the victims and their families.

These examples clearly illustrate Black otherness, invisibility, and a supposed deviance in the Appalachian region. The lynching and murdering of Black men occurred throughout the U. S., yet these stories are rarely discussed as a project of white supremacist legal justice. The Appalachian South is perhaps the poorest region in America, of which Blacks are the poorest, with no program or aid to help them.⁹⁵ Combine this with the history of murder, slavery, and fear of death all throughout the U.S., and Blacks have no option other than to protest and fight back against these racially oppressive institutions. Reflecting on the murder of Michael Brown, the same carnival that took place in Roanoke, Virginia and Morganton, North Carolina, also took place in Ferguson, Missouri. After being shot and killed by Darren Wilson, Michael Brown's body was left lying in the street for four hours. A clear message to Black communities and the world of what legal institutions in the U.S. do to Black people, illustrating their power and racism.⁹⁶

⁹³ Ibid.,360-8.

⁹⁴ Kevin W. Young, "The murder of Gladys Kincaid: The Story Behind the Ballads," *North Carolina Folklore Journal* 56, no. 1 (2009): 21-32.

⁹⁵ Greg Kaufmann, "Appalachia Gets Special Funding. The Black Rural South Deserves It Too," *The Nation* (blog), February 14, 2020. <https://www.thenation.com/article/politics/black-belt-southern-poverty/>.

⁹⁶ Julie Bosman and Joseph Goldstein, "Timeline for a Body: 4 Hours in the Middle of a Ferguson Street," *The New York Times*, August 23, 2014, sec. U.S., <https://www.nytimes.com/2014/08/24/us/michael-brown-a-bodys-timeline-4-hours-on-a-ferguson-street.html>.

Appalachia is no different than any other area of the U.S., it suffers from poverty, class-related problems, racism, health problems, underfunding, and most importantly oppression. Appalachia primarily serves as a scapegoat for the social, political, and economic problems in the U.S., yet the same problems that persist in Appalachia can be found elsewhere in the U.S. Therefore, one goal of the region should be to liberate itself from the forces of capital that have perpetually exploited and profited from region. This liberation, however, can only occur with the inclusion of a history that has been buried and forgotten, songs that tell of the horrible racism and violence Black people face every day. Solidarity can only exist with all the histories of oppression of people that exist in Appalachia. Only when historical Black oppression and whiteness in Appalachia are dealt with and recognized as historical and ongoing, can such a liberation occur. Black people must be included in the history of Appalachia, their voices and stories need to be heard, and whiteness must be recognized, to move towards solidarity.

Until whites in Appalachia relinquish their false narratives of class and racial superiority, can a true united social movement based on cross-racial solidarity exist. Any movement that insists on a remembering and rectifying past evils must commit to a re-remembering of the forgotten history of Black oppression, and an addressal of whiteness that enabled it. Only then can whites in Appalachia join hands with their fellow Black Appalachian and American citizens in solidarity to end racial injustice and class oppression. Scholars' writ large have ignored issues of race and class in Appalachia. In doing so, they are silencing Black voices and experiences central to the region. Leading to misunderstandings of Appalachian oppression as one of race as opposed to class. Not acknowledging the whiteness of Appalachia is to ignore the long history of Black racial oppression to which this chapter now addresses.

The making of racial oppression

Addressing race throughout the U.S. is paramount to understanding its presence in Appalachia, and the lack of scholarly attention it receives. As indicated, slavery and racism are as American as they are Appalachia. After all, race gives states divisive power over its subjects, noting that “states made race.”⁹⁷ Race is something that is historically embedded within economic, social, and political understandings of people. Vociferously, Khalil Muhammad discusses the association of criminality as wholly attached to the behavior of African Americans since the end of slavery.⁹⁸ Originally, race has been used to distinguish peoples from one another, and within European, and later American, colonialism, race was used to invoke white superiority. Race was first enacted as a form of cultural superiority, as whites described race as a matter of God and biological superiority.

Many liberal thinkers falsely grew to understand race as myth and that race as categorized “would fade with development or assimilation.”⁹⁹ They grossly misunderstood the power of racialization and stigma. The slave trade from Africa in the 1500s-1600s gave credence to white European elites supposed superiority. Of these Africans “roughly 20 percent...forced into trans-Atlantic slavery during the 1500s and 1600s died during passage.”¹⁰⁰ The movements of people, along with state based understandings of inferiority of Blacks, were integral to the establishment of white superiority, and a “white nationalism.”¹⁰¹ Capital understandings of slavery are primary to a white nationalism, as they “provided a pool of labor to replace an also

⁹⁷ Anthony W. Marx, *Making Race and Nation: A Comparison of South Africa, the United States, and Brazil* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 2.

⁹⁸ Khalil Muhammad, *The Condemnation of Blackness* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2010), 1, 271.

⁹⁹ Marx, *Making Race and Nation*, 3.

¹⁰⁰ Sylvester A. Johnson, *African American Religions, 1500–2000* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 97.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, 2.

insufficient supply of white indentured servants, colonists turned to the importation of slaves...to the North American colonies in 1619.”¹⁰² A theme that continues to repeat itself today with the continued assault against Black people.

To uphold a status quo and rid of conflict between whites, states enacted racial structures, identity, class, and oppression. To keep whites from fighting amongst one another, and insure a republic stronghold the “*white* elites acted strongly to strike bargains, selling out Blacks and reinforcing prior racial distinctions and ideology in order to unify whites.”¹⁰³ Thus, ““to bind up the nation’s wounds” among whites, Blacks were bound down, and the “wound of race was left to fester.”¹⁰⁴ This is evidenced by Sylvester Johnson in his work *African American Religions, 1500–2000*, when he evokes that the people aboard slave ships often died and were treated “not as people but as capital assets-as things- whose value could be insured in the event of loss.”¹⁰⁵ During the eighteenth century, fifty thousand Africans were transported to America per year, creating a dependency on the labor and establishing roots in slavery.¹⁰⁶ It is worth noting, however, that while Africans were imported as slaves, the current workforce of indentured white servants continued, although under much different living conditions and expectations. Importantly, most whites were indentured servants not slaves, a focus solely on the notion of establishing themselves as a free white man denies the ability to understand a more complicated understanding of the fear of slavery whites held. Many could see themselves as slaves because the conditions were close enough to instill these thoughts and imaginaries. Differences, however,

¹⁰² Ibid., 56., See also; David R. Roediger, *The Wages of Whiteness: Race and the Making of the American Working Class* (New York: Verso, 1999). Especially the First chapter which discusses whites as a freeman,

¹⁰³ Ibid., 2. Emphasis added.

¹⁰⁴ Marx, *Making Race and Nation*, 2.

¹⁰⁵ Johnson, *African American Religions, 1500–2000*, 99.

¹⁰⁶ Marx, *Making Race and Nation*, 56-7.

remained, and the belief that they would soon be free provided relief and an understanding amongst these whites that “slaves were born Black, not British, and were often in chains.”¹⁰⁷

Wilma Dunaway’s work *Slavery in the American Mountain South*, combats myths perpetuated by scholars and citizens alike that Appalachia was free of slavery. In her pivotal contribution against a revisionist history, Dunaway grapples with the long silenced history of slavery in Appalachia through both statistical evidence and first-hand slave accounts.¹⁰⁸ The small slave plantations found throughout the Appalachian region frequently punished slaves instilling “biological, spiritual, and intellectual inferiority of blacks.”¹⁰⁹ Dunaway estimates from Appalachian runaway slaves, that roughly half of all slaves in Appalachia were punished frequently by their masters. A runaway slave by the name Andrew Goodman described how vicious his master was, in gory detail he described the restraint and subsequent burning of an enslaved Black man. He noted that this left “Old Charlie” sick for four months until he died from his wounds.¹¹⁰ Memories of Appalachia focus on white understandings and depictions of hillbillies, but the Black experience is largely forgotten by whites in the mountains. Appalachian slaves resisted slavery through stories, myths, and spoke into being their existence through first-hand accounts. Spanning from Appalachian farms to larger plantations in the deeper Southern states, like other African Americans around the U.S., Black Appalachians actively participated in “community memory of injustices that the white system had heaped upon them.”¹¹¹ Poor whites also suffered from these systems, but not via racism, rather through class based understandings

¹⁰⁷ David R. Roediger, *The Wages of Whiteness: Race and the Making of the American Working Class* (New York: Verso, 1999), 31-2.

¹⁰⁸ Wilma Dunaway, *Slavery in the American Mountain South* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003).

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, 166.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 167.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*, 260-1, 198-9.

of inferiority and low culture for not seizing opportunity and wealth.¹¹² Struggling just to survive, many never owned their own farm and were often subjected to laborious work for very little pay, and were treated with as little respect as slaves in the region.¹¹³

White servants and wage workers were fearful of becoming like their African counterparts, and were provided with an assurance of freedom through service of work or wages, in theory separating them from Black people.¹¹⁴ The bondage of Africans encouraged non-slaveholding whites to accept the material goods, and be “proud to be “associated...with the masters.””¹¹⁵ This bondage created a Southern paternalistic order, as slavery was heavily ingrained in southern states.¹¹⁶ This is an indication of the creation of patterns on how Africans were viewed as “anti-citizens” and unworthy of any human right.¹¹⁷ African slaves were forbidden to learn how to read and write, raping of a slave was not a crime, and African ethnic traditions and languages were all but eroded to make way for white western indoctrination.¹¹⁸ This is not to say that slaves accepted their bondage, revolts did occur, and this led to more white fear of slavery.¹¹⁹ Accordingly, abolitionists were arguing for the freedom of Africans, however, they continued to use racial and cultural depictions of Blacks as inferior, somewhat invalidating their claims of liberation. The South, whose economy was emmeshed with slave labor, particularly in the Mississippi region, decidedly fought against the Northern states over their rights to a workforce.¹²⁰ Thus, the institution of slavery enacted a series of laws and established a

¹¹² Ibid., 41-7.

¹¹³ Ibid., 152-4.

¹¹⁴ David R. Roediger, *The Wages of Whiteness*, 32-6.

¹¹⁵ Marx, *Making Race and Nation*, 57.

¹¹⁶ Ibid., 56.

¹¹⁷ Roediger, *The Wages of Whiteness*, 57.

¹¹⁸ Marx, *Making Race and Nation*, 58.

¹¹⁹ Ibid., 58.

¹²⁰ Douglas A. Blackmon, *Slavery by Another Name* (New York: Doubleday, 2008),44-50.

state's rights approach towards keeping slavery as an institution in southern states.¹²¹ Race, then, became the prime component in establishing inferiority and dehumanized African people in the U.S. What becomes of interest before the Civil War is how the religious dimensions of race and class established in the U.S. furthered cultural oppression.

Religion and cultural inferiority through Race

Religion is of utmost importance to the oppression of Black people in the U.S. African slaves were taken and placed within a different culture, forced to assimilate into Christianity, however their salvation was not one of physical manumission but of supposed cultural cleansing. Africans were subjected to barbarous torture, ridicule, and conversion to the “god of their conquerors.”¹²² Although only a minority of Africans converted to Christianity, it is telling how Africans were conceived as unintelligent, and needing of salvation. Thomas Jefferson made this clear when he stated, “blacks, whether a distinct race, or made distinct by time and circumstances, are inferior to whites in body and mind.”¹²³ Phillis Wheatley, the victim of such vindication, demonstrates, in her compelling work, eloquent writing skill on Christian rescue, bringing to question the notions of inferiority.¹²⁴ Wheatley's prose, despite Jefferson's best efforts to bolster an elite white superiority, opened up a remarkably different view of Christianity.¹²⁵ John Shields pushes back against Jefferson's criticisms, describing Wheatley's work as a subversive text that drew on classic poetry, challenging both slavery and white oppression in the process.¹²⁶ African peoples

¹²¹ Marx, *Making Race and Nation*, 60-1; Johnson, *African American Religions, 1500–2000*, 209-22.

¹²² Johnson, *African American Religions, 1500-2000*, 140.

¹²³ Marx, *Making Race and Nation*, 40-1 (quoting Thomas Jefferson)

¹²⁴ Johnson, *African American Religions, 1500-2000*, 144.

¹²⁵ Phillis Wheatley, *The Poems of Phillis Wheatley*, ed. Julian D. Mason (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1989), 43-114.

¹²⁶ John C. Shields, *Phillis Wheatley and the Romantics* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 2010), 23-5.

around the world were now inoculated with Christianity, but they were increasingly wary of the promises of eternal salvation, altering of their worlds, and establishing new meanings of the world they lived in.¹²⁷ Demonstrating a continued need for states to enact racial and cultural supremacy via religion over African peoples in order to protect the myth of white nationalism it had created. These encoded nightmares of scientific and cultural fallacy led further domination of race, as citizenship was granted only to those with a white identity. These ideals and provisions quickly spread throughout colonial America and later the U.S. embedding itself in the walls of state institutions. This development of racial inclusion and exclusion through religion would provide a continual harvest of suffering and diaspora. Religion, culture, race, and class become entangled, and more difficult to parse through.

Within this framework of religious zeal and cultural inferiority, Olaudah Equiano (1745-1797) provides a critical assessment of the problems with this cultural-race rule.¹²⁸ Equiano, a former slave, presents in stark contrast to White European domination, a response using Christianity against them. He eloquently evokes problems with the traditional Christian understanding of Africa by relating his own religion to that of other “holy” writings. Equiano fashions his narrative in a manner to debunk modern biblical understanding of Africa as evil and void of history.¹²⁹ Despite this, Johnson informs us, African religion was considered vile and needed to be cleansed, Equiano was merely one of the first colonial African authors to take up this argument.¹³⁰ Thus, “the alienating structure of racial identity created a psychology of inferiority and existential crisis: to be Black was to be abnormal and to exist as an ontological

¹²⁷ Johnson, *African American Religions, 1500-2000*, 142-5.

¹²⁸ *Ibid.*, 145.

¹²⁹ *Ibid.*, 148-9.

¹³⁰ *Ibid.*, 150.

problem.”¹³¹ Equiano’s work, albeit intriguing, offers a grim vision of colonial rule and white superiority that is forced onto those conquered. Equiano wrote accordingly to demonstrate an African understanding through Christian and western thinking. Despite this, Equiano “bequeathed to Atlantic readers complicated meanings about slavery, Africa, scripture, and the prerogative of invention within the context of colonial violence.”¹³² To reiterate, the goal of the European colonial project was to use the juridical processes available to them to subjugate the races that lacked such capacity. In short, the goal was to “tame the savage mind and discipline the Black body or the indigenous polity.”¹³³

Similarly, as noted, religion serves as a primary method of oppression in the mountains of Appalachia as a method of attacking and civilizing a population thought to be othered and different. It is again, important to note that Appalachian otherness as constructed is one based on class and cultural distinctions as opposed to racial oppression of Blacks. In Appalachia, whites were pressured to convert to more institutional forms of worship, however, they were given agency unlike Blacks in the region precisely because they were white. Consequently, Blacks in Appalachia under slavery, were atomized by white slaveholder Christianity. Most Appalachian slaves went to church with their masters, and throughout the region before the Civil War, slave owners constructed small buildings and trained enslaved Blacks to preach the “gospel.”¹³⁴ In doing so, Blacks could meet with one another and reformulate the teachings in their own worldview. Enslaved Blacks subverted the slaveholder’s religion of Christianity as a means for revolution and retribution against their cruel masters. Black preachers were feared in Appalachia

¹³¹ Ibid., 150.

¹³² Ibid., 155; Cedric J. Robinson, *Black Marxism: The Making of the Black Radical Tradition* (University of North Carolina Press, 2000), 164-6.

¹³³ Ibid., 121.

¹³⁴ Dunaway, *Slavery in the American Mountain South*, 230-2.

because the use of Christianity for the benefit of Black liberation was an immediate threat to white supremacy.¹³⁵ Although, “they may have disguised their religious rhetoric at official services,” Blacks transformed slaveholder Christianity from one of oppression to a “future of deliverance and retribution.”¹³⁶

Johnson, and Marx’s works both embody a heavily underutilized understanding of white Christianity and its practices as a mode of anti-blackness through Christian freedom. This not only allowed whites to feel culturally superior to Africans, but also enabled a long-continued history of oppression and slavery. Dunaway’s work also dissects the notion of Appalachian innocence regarding slavery. Providing extensive data on the true problematic relationship between whites and Blacks in Appalachia. Although, many whites were poor, Dunaway is decisive in her descriptions that they were in no way oppressed for their race, rather for their class and the lack of it. Addressing the many similarities that exist across the U.S., most especially the extreme treatment of slaves in Appalachia, Dunaway’s account testifies for the need to not only address the dark history of slavery in Appalachia, but also the construction of otherness that arose from it. Therefore, the establishment of race, religion, and culture, enabled slavery to thrive in the U.S. Pre, and post-abolition. These thought processes of antiblackness are deeply ingrained in U.S. through the legacies of slavery. Currently, Black people are still resisting white supremacist institutions via memory, community activism, narrative, and song. No longer should Black people be “nobody.”

¹³⁵ Ibid., 233-40.

¹³⁶ Ibid., 240.

Legacies of Slavery

The ending of slavery is not a beautiful picture of freedom and justice, rather it is filled with further sorrow and strife. The Civil War was fought as a war concerning capital as much as it was a war concerning the freedom of Africans from their bondage. Regional economic interests from the South, slavery and agrarianism were challenged by the Northern industrial development. These tensions became tantamount for not only the fate of race in the country but that of class and economic status. The result of the war cost 623,000 troops, perhaps many more, fermenting the union and the abolition of slavery.¹³⁷ For Lincoln this was necessary to establish a centralized rule, but he also understood he must keep the Southern states involved after the war and heal the wounds left from it.

The South fought back against the call for equal rights for Blacks, and by freeing the slaves Lincoln reinforced racism, for many Blacks had no jobs or anywhere to call home.¹³⁸ Leaving them susceptible to their former masters. Lincoln enacted reconstruction in the South to keep the southern states appeased and combat the problems of Black susceptibility. Reconstruction programs such as “The Freedmen’s Bureau” provided a source of education, food, and medical care. For the first time care had been given to Blacks and with it “black literacy rose from 10 to 50 percent between 1865 and 1890, black land ownership rose, and per capita real income of Blacks increased 46 percent from 1860 to 1880.”¹³⁹ Ironically, these policies created tension amongst poor whites and Blacks, and by not also addressing needs of

¹³⁷ Marx, *Making Race and Nation*, 124.

¹³⁸ *Ibid.*, 126.

¹³⁹ *Ibid.*, 130.

poor southern whites, the government intentionally or unintentionally propelled anti-blackness.¹⁴⁰

Stringent and decisive efforts by Blacks to engage with their newfound political freedom was met with open white hostility and vengeance.¹⁴¹ Leading to the emergence of “organized White terrorists...on the heels of the Civil War as an extralegal strategy for undermining Black political agency.”¹⁴² In efforts to uphold white superiority, Blacks were prohibited to vote throughout the South due to disenfranchisement laws and a Democrat-controlled southern legislature. The era of Jim Crow had begun, and Blacks were extracted of all their resources, what little they had, to enable the continuation of white nationalism. Even the crafting of the Thirteenth Amendment that abolished slavery, enacted new forms of slavery that was constitutionally sanctioned punishment for convicted “criminals.”¹⁴³ These tenants held true in Appalachia as well. After the passing of the Fourteenth Amendment, former slaves went to the polls to ensure civil rights for their family and neighbors. Many migrated out of the region, but those who stayed persisted in farm work, leading to tensions between whites and Blacks over positions in the field.¹⁴⁴ With the passing of Jim Crow laws in Virginia, race lines were drawn stemming from the emergence of scientific racism, claims to legitimate whiteness and Black inferiority. Poignantly, Barnes reflects on Jim Crow laws in Appalachia as a removal of Black experience and community to demonstrate the poverty of whites who resided there.¹⁴⁵ Consequently, African Americans, under the guise of freedom, were criminalized and mass

¹⁴⁰ Ibid., 130-1.

¹⁴¹ Johnson, *African American Religions*, 237.

¹⁴² Ibid., 237.

¹⁴³ Ibid., 240.

¹⁴⁴ Jodi A. Barnes, “An Archaeology of Community Life: Appalachia, 1865–1920,” *International Journal of Historical Archaeology* 15, no. 4 (December 1, 2011): 678-9.

¹⁴⁵ Ibid., 699.

targeted for all crimes to gain capital control of Black people. Once again, African Americans were placed in bondage as literal slaves working in the fields or mines, often never making it out of said enslavement.¹⁴⁶ By the late 1800's, involuntary servitude clearly and rampantly targeted Blacks throughout the South. Constituting of primarily Blacks, the harsh sentencing of involuntary servitude ensured disparate treatment of Blacks selling them into a labor system that starved, brutalized, and killed them. In the first few years of prisoner leasing in Alabama the mortality rates rose each year for four years, topping out at a forty-five percent death rate.¹⁴⁷

This new slavery created through loopholes under the watch of white supremacist institutions persists in legally in courtrooms, prison, and even in the streets. The prerogative of these laws, that would eventually be replaced by less transparent legal forms oppression, is to instill within all Americans a culture of Black inferiority and Black criminality. African Americans convicted of small crimes results in a death sentence, African Americans existing becomes a death sentence. Thus, demonstrating U.S. institutions favor Black punishment, in prisons, courtrooms, and communities over equal justice. The Martinsville Seven, which is pivotal in relating this history to my hometown, is only one example of how Black lives were expendable.¹⁴⁸ The death sentences the Martinsville Seven and many Blacks still face are worse than slavery. Whether being shot in the street, lynched for existing, involuntary servitude, legal lynching, or incarceration for non-violent crimes, Black communities continually endure and resist these oppressive institutions whites do not face. Therefore, the convict-leasing system that existed until the 1920s insured white order and provided courts the ability to sentence large numbers of African Americans to their deaths. It is an amalgamation of both white vengeance

¹⁴⁶ Johnson, *African American Religions*, 240-1. Blackmon, *Slavery by Another Name*, 50-5

¹⁴⁷ Blackmon, *Slavery by Another Name*, 55.

¹⁴⁸ Eric W. Rise, *The Martinsville Seven: Race, Rape, and Capital Punishment* (University of Virginia Press, 1998).

and white supremacy, a continuation of the racial nightmare. “Crimes” committed during this time were usually trivial, with most ranging from petty theft to vagrancy.¹⁴⁹ Contrast these policies with “War on Drugs” policies that disenfranchised millions of Blacks for small quantities of marijuana, or a controlled substance, and a clear political and historical pattern of Black injustice and oppression arises in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries. Indicating not only a race based assault, but a furthered historical establishment of class-based oppression through race. By enforcing Blacks to have nothing, and ridding of hope that they could gain any social, political, or economic power, these white supremacist institutions are there to ensure Black inferiority. These brutal institutions continue to be used legally throughout the South, and rest of the U.S., as the continual murder of Black communities through police brutality, death, and harsh criminal punishment speaks to the virtues of white Christianity, and white supremacy.¹⁵⁰

Data from census reports in 1870, 1880, and 1890 demonstrate that “black criminality would emerge, alongside disease and intelligence, as a fundamental measure of Black inferiority.”¹⁵¹ Therefore, continuing throughout the twentieth and twenty-first century is an age old a myth of black criminality as a justification for the inequality faced by Black populations.¹⁵² A myth that persists in today’s social and political climate, establishing that their current class is not due to their racial status, but their own choices, which ironically they had no part in. Muhammad indicates throughout the early twentieth century, many false reports of black crime flooded newspapers, reinforcing that Blacks were dangerous to whites, and therefore did not

¹⁴⁹ Ibid., 63-9.

¹⁵⁰ Ibid., 198-200, 321. Michelle Alexander, *The New Jim Crow* (New York: The New Press, 2012).

¹⁵¹ Muhammad, *The Condemnation of Blackness*, 20-1.

¹⁵² Ibid., 21.

deserve housing in certain communities.¹⁵³ These were particularly evident in Philadelphia and Chicago. These narratives also appear across the South, with two examples directly from Appalachia, in Roanoke, Virginia and Morganton, North Carolina. Tensions against Black mobility led to hostility via lynching, stoning, and in all cases accusing them of criminal activities. Blacks were criminalized for fighting back for housing, as whites would accuse Blacks of crimes they did not commit, insisting that the Black resistance itself was a threat to white communities.¹⁵⁴ The first three decades of the twentieth century, many Blacks resisted police and provided evidence of corruption. Charles Johnson went as far to publish a paper refuting the 1919 arrest data of the Chicago police, which was three times the actual number in official police statistics.¹⁵⁵ This was primarily because the police system operated under racial understandings of crime, in which judges were likely to arrest and convict Blacks without any evidence of a crime.¹⁵⁶ Most of these crime statistics invoke cultural inferiority as its backdrop, establishing white European sentiments of African inferiority in a new American system of colonialism.

Jim Crow laws reinforced many racist stereotypes throughout the twentieth century, including Black as criminal and lazy, which remain highly salient today in the wake of continual police violence against Blacks. This, however, solidifies commonly held beliefs in the U.S. that being white is superior at the expense of Black life. By the mid twentieth century African Americans were beginning to organize more readily against oppression.¹⁵⁷ ¹⁵⁸ In the 1950-60s,

¹⁵³ Ibid., 101-5, 221.

¹⁵⁴ Ibid., 221.

¹⁵⁵ Ibid., 232-9.

¹⁵⁶ Ibid., 240-3.

¹⁵⁷ Marx, *Making Race and Nation*, 224.

¹⁵⁸ It is also important to note here, that throughout history African Americans have organized against means of oppression, whether that be in rebellion of slavery, religious reasons. See: Johnson, *African American Religions, 1500–2000*, Chapter 4 section on African as Stateless people for this, or for community reasons see Reiland Rabaka, *The Hip Hop Movement: From R&B and the Civil Rights Movement to Rap and the Hip Hop Generation* (Lexington Books, 2013), Remix 1.

Blacks were beginning to consolidate at a higher level, organizing based on race and identity. Terms that had enslaved, murdered, and stripped all rights away, was now a unifier. With Jim Crow segregation in effect throughout the U.S., many organizations such as the Southern Christian Leadership conference (SCLC), Student Non-violent Coordinating Committee (SNCC), and Congress of Racial Equality (CORE) led the push for equal rights within the U.S.¹⁵⁹ To combat these organizations the CIA and FBI claimed that SCLC was a communist movement, and that Black liberation was a threat to U.S. democracy and the White racial state. The FBI acted quickly and precisely, attempting in 1963 to stop the communist Black liberation.¹⁶⁰ This was made even more apparent when the FBI wire tapped Martin Luther King Jr.'s hotel room, and by 1965 the FBI sought to rid of King and the communist SCLC through proof of sexual infidelity.¹⁶¹

The FBI militarized violence against Black activists to rid of the supposed threat of Black activism. By enabling national networks of violence to exist, protestors like Fannie Lou Hammer, among others, were beaten so severely that they suffered permanent damage from the attacks.¹⁶² Ultimately, “this physical torture, in combination with decades of lynching, abductions, and bombings, was integral to maintaining the politically motivated terror of White rule.”¹⁶³ ¹⁶⁴ By the time Lyndon Johnson enacted the Civil Rights Act of 1964, many had perished and would perish at the hands of a racial regime. After the passage of the act Malcolm

¹⁵⁹ Marx, *Making Race and Nation*, 226-32.

¹⁶⁰ Johnson, *African American Religions, 1500–2000*, 346-52.

¹⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 352.

¹⁶² *Ibid.*, 366.

¹⁶³ *Ibid.*, 366.

¹⁶⁴ Among this violence prominent Ku Klux Klan members bombed a church in Birmingham, Alabama, which the FBI covered up for 15 years, Cedric J. Robinson, *Black Movements in America* (Routledge, 1997), 149.

X was assassinated, and all leaders of the Civil Rights Movement were silenced, freedom had finally arrived.¹⁶⁵

Existing before and after the Civil Rights Movement, “color-blind” legal doctrine had incentivized that race did not matter in the eyes of the law. Acting as an agent of erasure “color-blind” constitutionalism aims to rid of Black resistance by not acknowledging its existence. This leads to Black middle class conservatives bolstering claims that Black poor youth were criminal populations, and that the “Black elite is the guardian of the Black masses.”¹⁶⁶ The era of “class-based” racism has arrived, which is not to say that racism or class-based racism went away or did not exist prior to this. Rather, operating under the guise of Civil Rights, race became an icon of the past, with no more merit in today’s U.S. Creating a dominant discourse of white superiority and Black apathy through violent policies that would disproportionately devastate Black communities. Of primary interest is the role of poor whites in Appalachia, and the problematic understanding, or lack thereof, of race and whiteness in Appalachia.

The Deception of Class in Appalachia, U.S.A

Class and race have been interwoven throughout the progression of the U.S. to create a racial white dominance. The discourse of both have overseen the end of slavery and the Civil Rights Act of 1964. Nefariously, class has always been a way to circumnavigate race, by establishing a class-based antagonism based on cultural problems such as criminality and poverty. Throughout history, racism and white supremacy have found mechanisms to operate within the U.S. via convict leasing, terrorism, police brutality, state, and federal disenfranchisement, among other

¹⁶⁵ Robinson, *Black Movements in America*, 150.

¹⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 153.

examples. When the Civil Rights Act was passed in 1964, some of these injustices were relived, however, upon the passing of this act a new form of discrimination appeared, that of color-blind justice. A legal code that continues to attack most ferociously Black communities. Mark Golub provides an analysis that demonstrates how American politics are “marked by near-universal acceptance of antiracist norms...and are structured by relationships of racial domination and subordination.”¹⁶⁷ The argument is one of racial domination through the courts with an emphasis not on race, rather class through race to further engrain a white racial hierarchy.

Thus, to fully develop this argument of race and class antagonisms in the twenty-first century, this section briefly outlines how class in the U.S. became of utmost importance to whites during the 1800s. The outline of class provides a starting point for the development “post-racial” politics and highlight the intricacies of both racism and color-blind constitutionalism that have continued to perpetuate violence in African American communities. Presenting the current discourse of color-blind constitutionalism as one of historical ideology.

The myth of class

Class may not seem that it has carried much historical weight, due to the preponderance of racial institutions and white supremacy. That is a mask of supposed whiteness white workers wore, for it is with this ideal of racism through class that psychologically created superiority. The white worker hated Blacks and prevented her/himself from loving other people.¹⁶⁸ But the question becomes why did whites believe they were superior? The answer is one of historical deceit tying racism to class, connecting the two through labor relations and legal coding of peoples.¹⁶⁹

¹⁶⁷ Mark Golub, *Is Racial Equality Unconstitutional?* (Oxford University Press, 2018), x. Patricia Hill Collins, *From Black Power to Hip Hop: Racism, Nationalism, and Feminism* (Temple University Press, 2006), 2-3.

¹⁶⁸ Roediger, *The Wages of Whiteness*, 6-7.

¹⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 9-10.

Whiteness became a way for the worker to make up for the exploitation of his status. By adopting whiteness, the white worker could be above Blacks. Neither Black, nor slave, was the ideology adopted to evade confrontation of exploitation. White workers could simply help oppress Blacks that were more oppressed, if it meant a gain of small social status.¹⁷⁰

Non-elite Whites, however, early on separated themselves racially from Blacks, garnering the term ‘freemen’ during the American revolution to define themselves against slaves.¹⁷¹ By providing white workers with titles such a hireling and mechanic, they could differentiate themselves not only as a hireling, but as a free man with political rights and clout. Blacks were noncitizens amongst white workers, but they were also considered anti-citizens and pawns of the powerful elite, bolstering white freeman status as white, and demonizing the Black worker.¹⁷² The term white slavery was one that was heavily contested in the South due to the ramifications that they were equal to enslaved Blacks. This entanglement of race and class seems puzzling but in the antebellum South whites were opposed to any comparison, and often degraded the Black worker as taking on inhumane work and were simple minded. Terms like white slavery did not instill solidarity with enslaved Blacks, rather it bolstered movements to end the oppression of whites.¹⁷³ This was all an effort for whites to cope with the poor wage labor they received working similar jobs to that of African slaves. Whites used Black emancipation to critique their wages, further establishing “the importance of a sense of whiteness to the white U.S. worker was a long-established fact, not only politically but culturally as well.”¹⁷⁴

¹⁷⁰ Ibid., 13.

¹⁷¹ Ibid., 27.

¹⁷² Ibid., 46-57.

¹⁷³ Ibid., 68-80.

¹⁷⁴ Ibid., 87.

Barbara Ellen Smith provides a similar account of this process in Appalachia, focusing heavily of whiteness, and the lack of understanding around it.¹⁷⁵ Whiteness is a construct useful in working class functions to gain a higher-class position in society, no matter how menial this may be. In her explanation of whiteness in Appalachia, Smith focuses on three tensions in the evasion of whiteness, racial innocence, class over caste perspective, and the failure to situate hillbilly stereotypes in critiques of white supremacy creating a “misleading position that “hillbillies” are, in effect, a racial minority.”¹⁷⁶ Race is a signifier, it is both institutional and ideological in its implementation. The problem lies in the tendencies of Appalachian studies, which ignores completely the notion of whiteness. Smith proposes debate and starting points that begin with the notion of race in Appalachia as a structural relationship of inequality that all are positioned in. In sum, whiteness in Appalachia must be scrutinized, as race is a deep systemic phenomenon that informs all our institutions.¹⁷⁷ The lack of class discourse leads to problematic dynamics of racializing stereotypes of hillbillies. Appalachia’s predominant whiteness “requires scrutiny and challenge as an ongoing racial “accomplishment.””¹⁷⁸ With no true focus on racial discourse, oppression becomes under investigated and any discourse on the region that does not consider race, class, or gender are inherently flawed. Most importantly, false narratives of Appalachian innocence, likely due to low populations of African Americans post-World War II, provide an escape for whites in the region from confronting the horrors of slavery and systemic racism.¹⁷⁹ To be not Black in Appalachia, and America broadly, was better than being Black. This means, one does not have to confront oppression by the way others perceive them.

¹⁷⁵ Barbara Ellen Smith, “De-Gradations of Whiteness: Appalachia and the Complexities of Race,” *Journal of Appalachian Studies* 10, no. 1/2 (2004): 38–57.

¹⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 38-9.

¹⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 40-1.

¹⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 41.

¹⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 42.

Whiteness, as a racial identity, provides an escape from these problems, an allowance of injustice without mistreatment.

For Robinson, the Irish problem is integral to this conversation as Irish were, in the opinion of the English, savages.¹⁸⁰ Ireland was colonized and subordinated to fill the cheap labor needs of Europe. The Irish worker was considered inferior, and the labor conducted by them ideal for their inferiority.¹⁸¹ The English anti-Irish sentiments, can be linked to anti-Blackness in the U.S., as it pertains to both race and class. The Irish did not fare better in the U.S. through immigration, as they were hated and ridiculed, however, the Irish in the U.S. actively supported their whiteness. Thus, insisting on their whiteness and white superiority, they could avoid further ridicule, survive, and rid themselves of any connection with African Americans. Despite the calls for action and worker solidarity from Frederick Douglass and Daniel O’Connell, the Irish in America asserted themselves as white and gained an upper hand over their Black co-workers.¹⁸² The embrace of whiteness beckons an understanding of how “the weight of whiteness...and the ways in which whiteness was reasserted continued to burden workers of all colors.”¹⁸³

Smith precisely identifies that throughout the history of Appalachia, whiteness has enforced racial boundaries for Blacks, oppressed, and murdered Blacks, yet whites in Appalachia are convinced they are the victims of racism.¹⁸⁴ Whiteness is the real problem of racism, and without a historical understanding of racial narratives and class formation, this problem will persist. Most scholarly attention revolved around whites in Appalachia, but their whiteness is rarely discussed in books or articles. Without adequate attention to whiteness, the dominant

¹⁸⁰ Robinson, *Black Marxism*, 36.

¹⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 38-9.

¹⁸² Roediger, *The Wages of Whiteness*, 134-41.

¹⁸³ *Ibid.*, 170.

¹⁸⁴ Smith, “De-Gradations of Whiteness,” 44-5.

ideological systems in the U.S. based on meritocracy, in which any “disadvantage is due to one’s own shortcomings, or to the putatively intrinsic deficits of an entire group, is not just implicit but monotonously reinforced.”¹⁸⁵ This is evident in depictions of Blacks as poor, drug-dealers, and criminal, wherein cultural deviance as opposed to a genetic inferiority is the dominant racist representations that exist today. White working class stereotypes also operate in the racial logic in a twisted manner. Whites are not victims of racism, but through derogatory stereotypes of violence and backwardness against whites, working class whites are caught in between their racial privilege and class disadvantage. In sum, the white working class are white but not quite white enough, and these complicated intersections of race and class blame both people of color and the white working class for their own oppression, while obscuring “the structural realities of class by displacing them through and onto racism.”¹⁸⁶

The hillbilly stereotypes and supposed cultural inferiority as racist, establishing the mountaineer as an oppressed minority, sidesteps relations of power and evades racial benefits of whiteness, thereby promoting white supremacist positions of racial victimization. For example, in condemnation of a proposed 2002 show that would send Appalachians to Beverly Hills, the class-informed resistance against it also carried racial meaning. Advocates claimed that hillbillies are hard-working, unlike the rich and Black who are not from Appalachia.¹⁸⁷ As Roediger insists, the “wages of whiteness” applies to Appalachians who position themselves with traits of superiority in opposition to people of color and dominant elites.¹⁸⁸ The myths of racial innocence and victimization of Appalachian working class whites must stop for a true solidarity movement to take place in the region. By presenting hillbillies as an oppressed racial minority, the

¹⁸⁵ Ibid., 46.

¹⁸⁶ Ibid., 46.

¹⁸⁷ Ibid., 47-9.

¹⁸⁸ Ibid., 49.

opportunities for solidarity will continue to dwindle. What is required is a “full confrontation with race in Appalachia” and the processes of racial oppression and exclusion of people of color for the benefit of the hillbilly or working class white in Appalachia.¹⁸⁹ By acknowledging the overwhelming whiteness present in Appalachia and probing the meanings, origins, and implications of this, avenues for resistance and solidarity against white supremacy and class antagonisms can exist.¹⁹⁰ With a framework cognizant of the many intersections of race and class that exist, the whiteness of white Appalachians can be reckoned with. Above all else, “we can claim a race-conscious perspective that critically examines the history and contemporary experiences of all Appalachians through the lens of race, a perspective that explores the ways that race intersects with class...inflecting the social positions and experiences of all social classes.”¹⁹¹

Thus, class antagonism is cleverly connected to race, providing an out for impoverished whites to feel superior to their Black counterpart, yet continue to struggle under the white elite ruling class whom they will never be a part of. The Irish example presented by Robinson is pivotal to understand why an oppressed group would choose such a path. The simple answer is that the white worker took the easiest of routes. By doing so, they also choose against their own interests, for no matter how white they deemed themselves, they were still as poor and oppressed as the Blacks they disassociate with.¹⁹² The history of the U.S. is marred by race and class, with legal institutions upholding violence in the name of anti-blackness. The most immediate example of this is the current discourse in the U.S., the color-blind doctrine, the War on Drugs, and Mass

¹⁸⁹ Ibid., 51.

¹⁹⁰ Ibid., 50-1.

¹⁹¹ Ibid., 53.

¹⁹² Roediger, *The Wages of Whiteness*, 180.

Incarceration. The sooner we grapple with racist institutions in the U.S. and Appalachia, the better.¹⁹³

The Abandonment of a Promise

The inception of the Civil Rights Act brought with it hope of relief from systemic and barbaric torture for Blacks. This hope was met with a new style of racial hierarchy, one that was race-neutral, and results from previous understandings of “black as criminal” to imprison and murder Blacks legally.¹⁹⁴ As noted, social justice movements, particularly those containing political, social, and economic aspirations of Black men and women, are considered a threat to U.S. national policy. To address the threat to white supremacy, Congress began to enact harsh drug laws and did little to disguise the racism evident in the laws. The campaigns of Nixon and Reagan attacked poverty, drugs, and “criminals.” Criminals, as illustrated by Muhammad, had already been defined by legal institutions as Black a century or so ago, but more recently in courtrooms across the country including Martinsville, Virginia.¹⁹⁵ The ‘War on Drugs’ under Reagan oversaw the funding of federal law enforcement between the 1980s and 1990s skyrocket to hundreds of millions of dollars to combat the ‘drug problem’ in inner cities.¹⁹⁶ The clear target of these policies were Black and impoverished communities deemed problematic and expendable. Garnering support from white voters, by 1991, one fourth of young Black men were behind bars.¹⁹⁷

¹⁹³ Smith, “De-Gradations of Whiteness,” 53.

¹⁹⁴ Michelle Alexander, *The New Jim Crow* (New York: The New Press, 2012), 40.

¹⁹⁵ Eric W. Rise, *The Martinsville Seven: Race, Rape, and Capital Punishment* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1998). Muhammad, *The Condemnation of Blackness*, 226-34.

¹⁹⁶ Alexander, *The New Jim Crow*, 49.

¹⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 56

Along with record drug convictions, of which 90 percent were of African American or Latino descent, the military apparatus prospered as it stormed through cities and even schools with SWAT around the country.¹⁹⁸ Among the problems with police brutality and violence amongst Black people, was the mandatory sentencing that came with a conviction, as steep sentences for possession of Marijuana could functionally end the lives of Black youth.¹⁹⁹ As of 2008, the prison population topped 2.3 million up from 350,000 in a matter of 20 years due to harsh sentencing and the explicit targeting of Black people.²⁰⁰ While measures are being taken today to release those convicted of non-violent drug related crimes, the damage done to the Black community is undeniable. Michelle Alexander's vivid portrait of racism through color-blind doctrine in her work *The New Jim Crow*, asserts that the vast majority of those released from prison return, continuing the cycle of prison profits and further embed age-old mythical notions of Black criminality.²⁰¹ Alexander understands the power of colorblindness in modern U.S. legal policies as the primary method of Black enslavement in the present era. Colorblindness as a governing principle, "purports to see black and brown men not as black and brown, but simply as men—raceless men—who have failed miserably to play by the rules the rest of us follow quite naturally."²⁰² The power of U.S. governing ideology is experienced and felt, formatted with the exclusion and at the expense of Black people, that no longer function as such. But rather, Black men are defined as criminals and unfit for the promise of freedom, a habit "that has given rise to successive caste systems."²⁰³

¹⁹⁸ Ibid., 77.

¹⁹⁹ Ibid., 90-2. These sentences would be 4-7 years and sometimes exceed this.

²⁰⁰ Ibid., 93-4. Hannah LF Cooper, "War on Drugs: Policing and Police Brutality," *Substance Use & Misuse* 50, no. 8-9 (2015): 1188-94.

²⁰¹ Alexander, *The New Jim Crow*, 94-6, 230-2.

²⁰² Ibid., 241.

²⁰³ Ibid., 240. Muhammad, *The Condemnation of Blackness*, 100-4.

Colorblind institutions described by Alexander have their roots as far back as 1896, during the monumental case *Plessy v. Ferguson*, which upheld racial segregation on the grounds of “separate but equal.” Mark Golub’s work *Is Racial Equality Unconstitutional* highlights not only the importance of Justice Harlan’s famous dissent of a colorblind Constitution, but also the pivotal point that whiteness was upheld over all else in the U.S.²⁰⁴ Golub and Alexander both agree that the enactment of colorblind constitutionalism sought to upend any remedy for African Americans in favor of a white identity politics. A type of politics that claims to be ironically race-neutral, as if forgetting the long history of oppression based on race is an option.²⁰⁵ This is to say that throughout U.S. history, class has always been tied to race. This logic of colorblindness only works to create an ideology of racial supremacy and white rights, rather than providing a racial remedy.²⁰⁶ Many current examples, including the murders of Trayvon Martin, Michael Brown, Oscar Grant, and Breonna Taylor, among countless others illustrate that this logic is grounded in white supremacy.²⁰⁷ There is a reinforcement of ‘who’ matters that has been established early on. Alexander’s poignant reminder of police surveillance in Black communities demonstrates that the founding principles of racism, slavery, and violence are still experienced amongst African Americans.²⁰⁸ Race in our society has become prohibited, but whiteness has become the legal precedent, and a racially equal society would prohibit such a thing. Sticking to strict guidelines of anti-discrimination, and evading racial classifications, the U.S. has positioned itself firmly against the dream of racial justice that is a tenet of past and present Black social movements.

²⁰⁴ Golub, *Is Racial Equality Unconstitutional?*, 3.

²⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, 24-5

²⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, 168.

²⁰⁷ Ronald B. Neal, *Democracy in 21st-Century America*, Voices of the African Diaspora Series (Mercer: Mercer University Press, 2012), 43-8.

²⁰⁸ Alexander, *The New Jim Crow*, 89-96.

The question raised by policies such as the ‘War on Drugs’ and color-blind constitutionalism is whether these policies are inherently racist? Further evidence of this can be found in *Brown v. Board* (1954), in which the court aimed to uphold white political interests through indirect discrimination.²⁰⁹ Meaning, the Court sought to accommodate white interests over all else by allowing schools the decision to consolidate with no set timeframe or guidelines. An example of this is in the establishment of affirmative action, which prohibited discrimination based on race, gender, and sex, providing access to institutions that were previously unavailable for many minority populations. The ideals of affirmative action, however, tend to uphold the interests of whites through claims of reverse-discrimination, and the courts and legal system have agreed with these claims, demonstrating a willingness uphold a white political order even within counter policy.²¹⁰ By not addressing race, and upholding a doctrine that embodies racism, the U.S. system has shaped itself in a manner that continues to terrorize and plague those in the Black and Brown community. Upholding a race-neutral society only benefits a white supremacist order, one that uses whiteness as a model for governance. Indicating, that “racial indifference and blindness—far more than racial hostility—form the sturdy foundation for all racial caste systems.”²¹¹ By embracing the ideas of a race-neutral society, the past is said to not exist, yet it continues to reproduce the same methods of racial injustice and violence. The color-blind doctrine incentivizes the targeting of Black people to sustain and perpetuate racism in the name of a supposed “equality.”²¹²

The connections between class and race in the U.S. cannot simply be forgotten. History is always there, and by enacting color-blindness as an institution, it announces that this history

²⁰⁹ Golub, *Is Racial Equality Unconstitutional?*, 126-8.

²¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 130-3.

²¹¹ Alexander, *The New Jim Crow*, 242.

²¹² Kristian Williams, *Our Enemies in Blue: Police and Power in America* (Chico, California: AK Press, 2015)..

never existed. Similarly, Hayden White argues that history is determined by those who imagine it narratively from a certain past, that past being one of racial violence, whiteness, and class based understandings.²¹³ The plea of many Black, Latino, and other impoverished minorities, is one of remembrance, an acknowledgement of the problems associated with race and class, not the dismissal of them. In his work *Democracy in 21st-Century America*, Ronald Neal proclaims, “American society is divided along the lines of class and race...the socially mobile class and the socially immobile class... “us” and them.”²¹⁴ The question of how to engage with such problems is now of utmost importance. How can solidarity exist in a place where there is no history? To answer this question briefly, much work is being in Appalachia to combat racism and educate citizens on the history of the region. Appalshop, a Kentucky based initiative, aims to educate youth in the region through local narratives that discuss the issues of race, class, and culture, combating the negative stereotypes and revisionist history of Appalachia.²¹⁵ Many of the interns at Appalshop work to create documentaries and series that connect and engage with people in their communities as well as others. The possibility of this connection, allows for a re-imagining of one’s identity, opening avenues towards solidarity and new understandings of community in Appalachia. Allowing youth led movements to discuss their own history, enables social, political, and economic change that addresses racism and other difficult conversations they could not have otherwise. Programs like Appalshop, allow for youth in the region to re-imagine and reconstruct their communities to be inclusive, historically aware, and incentivize activism for racial justice through narrative.²¹⁶ Even more promising, are the marches throughout Appalachia

²¹³ Hayden V. White, *The Content of the Form: Narrative Discourse and Historical Representation* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1987).

²¹⁴ Neal, *Democracy in 21st-Century America*, 121.

²¹⁵ Katie Richards Richards-Schuster and Rebecca O’Doherty, “Appalachian Youth Re-Envisioning Home, Re-Making Identities,” in *Transforming Places: Lessons from Appalachia*, ed. Stephen L. Fisher and Barbara Ellen Smith (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2012), 78–91.

²¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 82-90. For more on Appalshop visit their website: Appalshop.org.

in response to the murders of George Floyd and Breonna Taylor by law enforcement. In Kentucky, Virginia, North Carolina, and Alabama, marches for social justice and police reform provide hope for a greater movement in the region to recognize its whiteness and fight back against social injustices against Black people. These marches potentially demonstrate the start of something wonderful, the start of a solidarity movement that is reckoning with the racism and whiteness of the region, and the beginning of change in Appalachia.²¹⁷ The Black Lives Matter movement presents an opportunity for Appalachians to educate themselves on the racial past of the U.S., an understanding of whiteness, and a movement against racial injustice to enable a better region and country for all people. Black lives matter in Appalachia, because they always have, and it is long overdue to tell their stories and enable cross-racial solidarity against racial injustice in the region..

In Appalachia, the problems of addressing and confronting whiteness, and issues of racism are paramount to enact change in the region and elsewhere. Although much work is being done to confront and address problematic racial stereotypes and the erasure of history, it must continue for any solidarity to occur in Appalachia. Thus, colorblind-constitutionalism acts as a modifier of race and class problems by not addressing the long-standing history of oppression in the U.S. The discourse has not shifted that much, rather it has disguised itself, and enacted violence based on class through race. Elusively, whiteness operates to extinguish social movements through understandings of white victimization mirroring white supremacist beliefs. The history of slavery, racism, and class-based antagonism exist throughout the region, and they

²¹⁷ Bill Turner, "Black Lives Have Always Mattered in Appalachia. Just Look to Our History.," Lexington Herald Leader, accessed February 9, 2021, <https://www.kentucky.com/opinion/op-ed/article243815142.html>. Piper Hudspeth Blackburn, "Black Appalachians Find Hope in National Reckoning on Race," AP NEWS, September 29, 2020, <https://apnews.com/article/race-and-ethnicity-louisville-kentucky-racial-injustice-whitesburg-21b24722b9c20a5a7e4cea3c9a5c03de>.

must continually be reckoned with. Current marches and activism against the murders of Black men and women in the form of the Black Lives Matter movement in the U.S., especially in Appalachia is hopeful. This, however, is only part of an ongoing struggle for recognition in supposedly “different areas” of the U.S.

Returning to this place: Music as an avenue forward?

This chapter provides a stringent reminder of race and class oppression through an examination of slavery, racism, white supremacy, the creation of place, and class-based formulations of society. Illustrative examples prove that racism is present through constructions of inferiority, oppression of rights, class, and perhaps most loudly an erasure of history. The quotidian life of Black people worldwide is one of death that exists within the ‘wake.’²¹⁸ In Christina Sharpe’s work *In the Wake: On Blackness and Being*, the wake operates as a reminder of death that has occurred as a form of justice for Black people, a movement of slave ships on the water, and the immediate presence of slavery.²¹⁹ Living in the ‘wake’ means living in the past of slavery, terrorism, as well as the present day injustice against Black people. Sharpe emphasizes a need to understand how Black life is structured, and why these stories must be told as they are lived. Existing in the wake and exploring its history provides an illustration of the life, death, and injustice Black people face. To be within the wake is to understand and reckon with slavery, although it presents questions of how a white person can live in the wake, and perhaps by existing in the current racial state, whiteness has always operated as an enforcement of othering and death.²²⁰ Moreover, if this is the case, the slave ships on which Africans were brought over

²¹⁸ Christina Sharpe, *In the Wake: On Blackness and Being* (Duke University Press, 2016), 5-13.

²¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 16.

²²⁰ *Ibid.*, 22.

operate as a reminder of the continual suffering, inequality, death, and the afterlives of slavery.²²¹ This is advanced in Patricia Hill Collins work *From Black Power to Hip Hop*, in which the recognition of the turmoil's of the past by women like Fannie Lou Hammer, open up the possibilities for all people, and "empowering African Americans meant "trying to bring liberation to all people.""²²² By re-remembering the past while in the present, Black people are always living the trauma of slavery, and are always stuck in those ships that hold them. Within Appalachia, Blacks are reprimanded to second-class status through invisibility in economic stimulus packages that were never received, violence, and racial injustice. Although not all suffer intense poverty in Appalachian, Black families tend to carry the heaviest burdens.

The hold is, in Sharpe's view, the essence of capital manifested in language or the hold of the ship. This is an embodiment of capital progression of chattel slavery, a language forced upon, an immanent death.²²³ This directly elicits Robinson's claim that "the racial mythology that accompanied capitalist industrial formation and provided its social structures engendered no truly profound alternatives."²²⁴ Black being is predicated on accepting a language that has offered nothing but despair, and a normalization of the circumstances that come with it.²²⁵ Much like the color-blind doctrine today, the continuation of violence, or assumed violence, only gives credence to a white supremacist mantra of capital. It is because of this brutality, that a Black radical tradition has formed, and it aims to supersede those chains and enact Black liberation.²²⁶ For Robinson and Collins, remaining in the wake asserts a necessity of Black liberation against the struggles that remain. The role of anti-blackness, however, still exists within legal structures

²²¹ Ibid., 30-40.

²²² Collins, *From Black Power to Hip Hop*, 126.

²²³ Sharpe, *In the Wake*, 71.

²²⁴ Robinson, *Black Marxism*, 316-17.

²²⁵ Sharpe, *In the Wake*, 88-9.

²²⁶ Robinson, *Black Marxism*, 167-71, 317.

and abounds throughout time. “Anti-blackness is pervasive as climate,” it always fixes itself among institutions.²²⁷ By examining the history of slavery, and providing an understanding of institutional racism through the autopsy reports of Michael Brown, a site of resistance is produced against the continued assault on Black people.²²⁸ Allowing for “wake work,” allows for a beholding of history, a site of resistance and continual acknowledgement of these troubles through a critique of language and the everyday problems Black people face. Remaining in the wake for Appalachians enables many to reflect and educate themselves of the horrendous racial violence Blacks across the country have endured and how whiteness enables it. By reckoning with these racial pasts, and educating themselves about these histories and whiteness, whites in the region can begin to recognize the trauma Blacks carry.

Frantz Fanon in his work *Black Skin, White Masks*, expresses similar understandings that whites are forever locked in their whiteness, blind to its operation.²²⁹ This makes these patterns difficult to overcome, because whites seem unable to recognize their role in racial injustice. Racism, for Fanon, is embedded in the white man, he carries hatred towards Blacks. It is then Fanon’s plea that Blacks do not seek to be like their oppressors, but rather stand together in solidarity, and to understand one’s own positions in the world is to strive for racial justice.²³⁰ In sum, Fanon advocates for a similar recollection of history, but also the need for whites to see their own whiteness as a detriment to not only themselves but those who suffer because of it. In line with Fanon are the works of Afrofuturism. Ytasha L. Womack, in her work *Afrofuturism: The World of Black Sci-Fi and Fantasy Culture*, defines Afrofuturism “as a way of imagining possible futures through a black cultural lens...to encourage experimentation, reimagine

²²⁷ Sharpe, *In the Wake*, 106.

²²⁸ *Ibid.*, 123-34.

²²⁹ Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks* (New York: Grove Press, 1967; 2008).

²³⁰ *Ibid.*, 202-6.

identities, and activate liberation.”²³¹ Instead of history and archival work, though not ignorant of it, Afrofuturism provides an umbrella for new narratives and uses imagination as a method of resistance against white supremacist institutions.²³² Afrofuturism is an important motif, because it opts to operate outside of the mechanisms of oppression through music, art, and technology, Afrofuturism wholly embodies a move to the future from the problems of the past. Musicians such as, Sun Ra and Jonelle Monae, demonstrate through their music, the power of thinking towards the future has on resisting the evils of racism and a world free of white supremacy.²³³ Afrofuturism is a tool “for wielding the imagination for personal change and societal growth,” it “encourages the beauties of African diasporic cultures and gives people of color a face in the future.”²³⁴ The music group Parliament, provided a glimpse towards a future through imaginative riffs and sounds, singing that the mothership was for all Black people to experience a future of endless possibilities, striving to put Black people in positions of power free of racial injustice.²³⁵

Thus, operating within the logic of the wake enables progress towards resistance and solidarity. It aligns with Keeanga-Yamahtta Taylor’s declaration that to resist structures of racism, Black Liberation must be about understanding the origins of oppression that conduct strategies so that Black people can live in peace.²³⁶ By remembering painful, and shameful past grievances, Appalachians of all races can come together and support their fellow community members that are continually excluded. Black liberation is inherently bound up in the project of human liberation, it is about consistently staying in the wake and acknowledging the past to

²³¹ Ytasha L. Womack, *Afrofuturism: The World of Black Sci-Fi and Fantasy Culture* (Chicago: Lawrence Hill Books, 2013), 9.

²³² *Ibid.*, 24.

²³³ *Ibid.*, 66-76.

²³⁴ *Ibid.*, 191.

²³⁵ Parliament, *Mothership Connection*, CD (Detroit: Casablanca, 1975).

²³⁶ Keeanga-Yamahtta Taylor, *From #BlackLivesMatter to Black Liberation* (Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2016), 194.

achieve these futures in Appalachia. Black liberation in Appalachia can open the region to the immense potential of solidarity. By acknowledging and attempting to amend for the terrible past, pride can be replaced with solidarity and away from racial injustice. Assad Haider's work *Mistaken Identity: Race and Class in the age of Trump*, describes that a truly successful social movement needs to move away from these state ideologies, and press forward for a universal emancipation, one that adheres to the core construct of socialism. The problems of white identity politics have enmeshed a cultural fear that must be erased for solidarity to occur.²³⁷ Taylor and Haider both acknowledge the need to come together, and for a cross-racial solidarity social movement to occur, acknowledgement of whiteness and anti-black racism must be addressed. Within Appalachia, movements aligned with challenging held assumptions of race and class have operated for over fifty years. The Appalachian based organization Urban Appalachian Council (UAC) has promoted interracial committees to oppose policies aimed to defund both Black and white neighborhoods in Cincinnati.²³⁸

The main question that comes from this is how can a social movement transpose the distinctions of identity and problems of difference? Should oppressed groups have to join with other groups to be successful? Can a true solidarity movement that brings many groups of people succeed? Whose burden is it? The goal of this chapter was to address the possibility of progress through an understanding of historical remembering. The importance of Black liberation, Afrofuturism, and the Afropessimist view of Sharp, understands that for solidarity to occur our society must acknowledge the past while also imagining the future. These concepts matter because for them to succeed, whites must come to grips with their own whiteness. Having tools

²³⁷ Assad Haider, *Mistaken Identity: Race and Class in the Age of Trump* (New York: Verso Books, 2018), 100-2.

²³⁸ Philip J. Obermiller et al., "Identity Matters: Building an Urban Appalachian Movement in Cincinnati," in *Transforming Places: Lessons From Appalachia*, ed. Stephen L. Fisher and Barbara Ellen Smith (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2012), 63-77, 65-6.

available that provide both education and an imagination of the future is key to building bridges toward solidarity and improving our society for all. The barrier to this for whites is their own whiteness and the failure to acknowledge its role in racial injustice. A social movement of this magnitude may take many years, or may never exist, but with the promise of Black liberation as a liberation of all people, the work towards racial justice is already in motion. Appalachia must reckon with its history and whiteness to imagine a future of thick cross-racial solidarity, so that Blacks and whites alike can overcome this injustice together. How can we create these bridges?

The answer can be found in the music we listen to. Music has long been a way to fight back against injustice and provide an avenue to spread one's thoughts to their community or in today's case the world. Musical similarities and cultural roots between Blacks and whites are present throughout Appalachia. The banjo being of utmost importance, as it comes from Africa, but has long been associated with white Appalachian culture. The genres of bluegrass, country, and hip hop we know today can be traced to African banjo players that were found throughout Appalachia. An examination of this alongside the history of the region provides painful memories, and demonstrates how music, much like the history of racial injustice, must be acknowledged to have a thick cross-racial solidarity.

Conclusion

This chapter distinguishes how race and class have created a continuation of racism through the guise of raceless white judicial province. Connecting slavery with the issues of racial injustice pervading in the modern era, it is apparent that the carcinogenic reaches of slavery, and racism broadly, have produced troubling futures for Blacks and whites alike. It is the production of race

through class that is present in modern U.S. discourse. Violence, oppression, and disenfranchisement all still occur under legal codes targeted Black and impoverished communities. Both race and class signal a great historical oppression, one that has repeated itself in many iterations by imprisoning and murdering Black people. It is of great importance to not forget the plight of the impoverished whites choosing an ideology of whiteness over their fellow oppressed. While this is discouraging not all bridges have been burned, and in Appalachia, I believe the soil is ripe for a continued radical discourse that aims for solidarity against white supremacist systems of power. This of course relies heavily on the acceptance of whiteness in the region for any movement to occur.

These ideologies in turn have shaped modern U.S. discourses and informed state legal structures. The continual misdiagnosis of Africans as misguided, unintelligent, criminal, simple, servile, and culturally inferior, have gone on to interpolate state guided repression. Revolutions take time to disentangle, and despite the best efforts of many, more work must be done to combat these ideologies of race and class. A thick cross-racial solidarity movement in Appalachia that unites both oppressed whites and Blacks could counter current white supremacist colorblind ideologies. Black liberation will continue without whites, but there is nothing to lose and much more to gain for whites living in Appalachia, as Black liberation entails human liberation.

A productive pathway towards a solidarity movement in Martinsville, Virginia, and more broadly Appalachia exists in music. The rich and vibrant history of music in the region can lead to connections and productive conversations of race and class histories. Although, it too is a painful history filled with racism and violence, the banjo and its origins can provide a bridge towards cross-racial solidarity through untold stories of Black oppression and liberation. Music, for this project, operates as a tool to unearth histories of racial oppression and connect people

and issues to places in the struggle for liberation. It provides an avenue towards racial justice, and to imagine new worlds. It is up to those that hear the untold stories of Blacks in Appalachia to listen and combat racial injustice.

Chapter 2: Musical Connections across the Mountains in the Banjo

“Once a Black cultural practice takes a prominent place inside the commodity system, it is no longer considered a Black practice”- Tricia Rose

What stories can music tell? The banjo, long associated with the mountains of Appalachia and an integral part of most who grow up in the region, is a symbolic representation of this question. Country and bluegrass music, like most genres, got its start from somewhere, but what history can it be traced to? This chapter investigates the origin of the banjo and its relationship with the development of the musical genre of bluegrass and country throughout the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. Unsurprisingly, the history of the banjo is intricately tied to a messy racist past that provides further evidence of the need for a responsible solidarity movement that acknowledges this past and works towards Black liberation. As an avid listener of country and bluegrass music, I ask: what can the banjo provide for a solidarity movement and how can we confront these racist pasts?

This chapter opens with an examination of the banjo and its direct African ancestry. This section elaborates on how the banjo was first used by enslaved Blacks and picked up by whites creating a combination of musical influences that is heavily associated with Appalachia. However, these stories, along with the history of racism in the U.S., are rarely told and often censored. The history of the banjo is one of oppression and violence that is directly linked with institutions of slavery. Many Blacks put the banjo down to find a career in other forms of music, because the music they knew had been stolen, mocked, and commercialized. The second section provides an analysis of the historical development of the genres known as race, old-time, “hillbilly”, or later country and bluegrass music. Using the many accounts of the minstrel stage, I examine the ways in which black-face minstrelsy established racial boundaries and

understandings of Black life, and how it re-enforced them. The history of minstrelsy is traced through the banjo as a mechanism of racial control, cross-culture influence, and violence. This section examines the birth of minstrelsy as a method of ideology and white anxiety, leading to Black musicians and composers taking the stage to reclaim their culture and combat the racist stereotypes that plagued them. Facing both difficulties from whites and Jim Crow segregation, I use the example of Will Marion Cook who performed to both appease white audiences and provide a place for Black success. This section provides a historical account of white and Black minstrels, and the influence of Blacks on white Appalachian banjo players. This racist history of minstrelsy provided whites with the image of ignorant, criminal, and dangerous Blacks they imagined, and it led to further segregation of musical styles.

The third section examines the segregation of Black and white music with the development of race and old-time or “hillbilly” records. As technology was advancing, record companies were looking for a way to make money, but also establish racial boundaries. Creating these categories enabled further racist understandings of Black culture and life. With its surging popularity, Blacks were rarely allowed in the field of old-time or “hillbilly” music and were supplanted at the back of the line to create so called race records. As time progressed, bluegrass and country music became the title for “hillbilly” records, continually blocking Blacks from participating in music they helped create. This section further reveals that the racist institutions that existed during slavery still exist in the country music industry that refuses to acknowledge the history of oppression and racism. The chapter concludes with an examination of Otis Taylor and Our Native Daughters. These Black artists seek to retell the stories of the banjo from a Black perspective, confronting the issues of slavery, class, and racism. Both amplify Black female voices to reclaim the banjo and tell new stories that echo through the mountains of Appalachia.

The hope is one of connection and solidarity, a remembrance of the erased histories of Blackness in Appalachia and the U.S. Histories that must be reckoned with to tell the true stories of the many great Black musicians of the past. A reclaiming of the hope for a future to combine with the musical efforts of Black musicians that sought a different path of resistance to white supremacy.

A forgotten tune of ‘Home’

Bluegrass is known for its inescapable ties to the Appalachian region. The impact of bluegrass is heard in various musical genres today including country and hip hop. Bluegrass relates to social concerns of change and plays a sharp contrast to a home one knows.¹ Listening to bluegrass and country music provides a sense of home without being there. The history of bluegrass is marred and disjointed, often offering explanations that Bill Monroe is the father of the genre, named after his band “Bill Monroe and His Bluegrass Boys” in the mid-1940s. Histories of when, why, and how bluegrass started, and the many influences surrounding the music, is a task not fully possible in this project, and is a task this project does not attempt.² Of interest, however, is the history of the instrument so prominent in bluegrass recordings and its impact on the music then and now, the banjo. Many scholars have not addressed the fractured memories of those that originally played the banjo, leading to problematic of whiteness, and the erasure of Blackness. It is then not a goal of this work to argue what bluegrass is, but rather where and who it came from,

¹ Neil V. Rosenberg, *Bluegrass: A History* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2005) 7-8.

² There are numerous sources that cover in detail the development of country music and bluegrass. This project while drawing from many of these sources, is not concerned with a simple history of bluegrass and country. I am interested in an examination of musical links, oppression, and untold narratives present in the genre. If you would like a full recap of country music see, Bill C. Malone and Tracey Laird, *Country Music USA: 50th Anniversary Edition*, Third (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2018). Ivan M. Tribe, *Folk Music in Overdrive: A Primer on Traditional Country and Bluegrass Artists* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 2018).

where it went, and what it means. Bluegrass is best explained through the examination of the instruments used in its development and the musical progression of the genre. The banjo is synonymous with bluegrass offering certain tones, along with high-pitched singing, providing the music many grew up with in the mountains. An instrument of African origin, many Blacks who once played the banjo, both the original gourd banjo and later five-string banjo, put them down in favor of other instruments such as the guitar. Due to the lack of opportunity afforded to them by the banjo, Black musicians had to reinvent the music they grew up playing. As stated throughout, Black voices are relatively silenced, or unknown, in Appalachia by both insiders and outsiders of the region. The history of banjo players, singers, and songwriters stretches back before emancipation. The music played on plantations by both white and Black people alike owes itself to a different story, one of suffering, pain, and hope for something anew. Bluegrass and country music have evolved throughout the years, via commercialism from old-time “hillbilly” music into new genres to stay true to the tune of a white home and make money doing it. This section examines the history of the banjo its significance to Appalachia, the ways in which music was segregated, and what if anything this provides for a movement of solidarity. Is bluegrass the voice of the oppressed? Or is it the logos of the oppressor?

The Banjer’

The banjo is an intriguing instrument. Brought from Africa to keep newly purchased slaves alive through morale, it has become a staple of music associated with Appalachia today. Originally constructed from a hollowed out gourd, it provides a unique sound that is heavily correlated with Appalachia and not the Black experience. The gruesome history of the banjo baffles and inspires through the avenues it created for resistance, but also the weight of systemic racism and oppression it upholds. The musical and racial history of the U.S. is intertwined with the banjo as

it was played on plantations by enslaved Blacks as noted by Thomas Jefferson in the late 1700s, or even today via musical groups such as *Gangsta Grass* who incorporate banjo and fiddle music into hip hop beats, rap, and old time singing.³ Dena Epstein notes the many forms and names the banjo took throughout history both in the U.S. and abroad, distinguishing it in all cases as an instrument of African origin.⁴ As it is not in best interest to fully examine this history, the discussion starts around the mid-nineteenth century when the banjo began to take off via Blackface minstrelsy and later hillbilly music. As studies show, the banjo was introduced by Africans, who then began to pass it on to whites in the nineteenth century.⁵

The banjo, often regarded as the emblem of Appalachia via white folk who played traditional music from their European roots, tells only half-truths.⁶ The history of this instrument, often associated with white bluegrass players, is entangled within the dark lines of slavery and Black and white cultural exchange. It is forever a reminder of musical expression and musical roots while also instilling tortured memories of slavery and racism.⁷ But, why was it put down by Blacks, and why is the history of the banjo so whitewashed? The answer is multifaceted with race, money, and power relations creating an environment of hostility and little benefit for Blacks to play the instrument they likely grew up with. This provides an understanding that, much like the myth of a homogenous Appalachian culture, there is no such thing as Appalachian music. Bluegrass, country, and the banjo of course have ties to the region, but that does not

³ Dena J. Epstein, "The Folk Banjo: A Documentary History," *Ethnomusicology* 19, no. 3 (1975): 354, 359.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 351-2.

⁵ Cecelia Conway, *African Banjo Echoes in Appalachia: A Study of Folk Traditions* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1995). 39.

⁶ *Ibid.*, xii.

⁷ Robert B. Winans, *Banjo Roots and Branches* (University of Illinois Press, 2018), 8.; Dena J. Epstein, *Sinful Tunes and Spirituals: Black Folk Music To The Civil War* (Urbana.: University of Illinois Press, 1977).

define the diversity of music and expression that exists throughout the region.⁸ Cecelia Conway's work *African Banjo Echoes in Appalachia*, analyzes the importance, but also the tragedy that is the banjo, and those that play it in the hills. Her claim that the banjo and its influence existed in Appalachia far before blackface minstrels took the stage raises important questions about the region regarding solidarity, race, class, and religion.⁹

The population of Appalachia as defined in chapter one, is widely varied, and throughout the 1800s into the early 1900s the Black population exploded due to both slavery and job opportunities post emancipation.¹⁰ This history provides both, evidence of the misconceptions of racial innocence in Appalachia, and dispelling the harmful myth of a homogenous culture in Appalachia. People find it far easier to cope with Appalachia if it is thought of as a homogenously white area rather than an area of multiracial interactions with Black leaders. The problem with this, as discussed in chapter one, is an erasure of important history and a further masking of the whiteness that does exist in Appalachia unreckoned with. The region, socially constructed as poor and white by scholars, journalists, screenwriters, and authors, makes the history more approachable and less problematic, but also fragmented and dishonest.¹¹ Banjo playing styles and the traditions that are frequent in Appalachia, however, push back against the narratives of a white Appalachian music. As these musical traditions are largely from African griot traditions that were enslaved in the piedmont region in North Carolina, with an intermingling of white European and Native American population in the area. Contrary to the

⁸ Bill C. Malone, "Music," in *High Mountains Rising: Appalachia in Time and Place*, ed. Richard A. Straw and H. Tyler Blythen (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2004), 115.

⁹ Conway, *African Banjo Echoes in Appalachia*, xxii-xxiii.

¹⁰ William H. Turner, "The Demography of Black Appalachia: Past and Present," in *Blacks in Appalachia*, ed. William H. Turner and Edward J. Cabbell (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 1985), 237-61. Karida Brown, *Gone Home: Race and Roots Through Appalachia* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2018).

¹¹ Emily Satterwhite, *Dear Appalachia: Readers, Identity, and Popular Fiction since 1878* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2012), 25.

historical narrative of a white homogeneous culture, the thumping of the banjo was used in dances to entertain blacks and whites alike and is a major influence on guitar playing styles and the blues and country music today.¹² Noting the vast Appalachian backcountry, Phil Jamison insists that due to the diverse populations of African, white, and Native American, many interactions and cultural exchanges likely took place in the mountains.¹³ The banjo is a prime indicator of these interactions and the lack of documentation on these traditions and musicians continues themes of historical erasure of oppressed peoples.

Importantly, this type of exchange likely happened across the rural South, but in Appalachia often these traditions that were passed on stayed somewhat the same due to limited, although not entirely remote and isolated, contact with the outside world.¹⁴ This provides new understandings about solidarity in the region as poor whites and Blacks would often sing together while working in the field, harboring continual opportunities for interaction. These Black banjo players often taught their families, and even whites, how to play the banjo in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.¹⁵ Two of the more prominent banjo players were Thomas Dartmouth Rice and Joel Sweeney, who apprenticed with enslaved Blacks to learn how to play in the 1830s and would later take the show around the country and overseas to earn a living.¹⁶ This would in turn shape minstrelsy and the eventual capital exploitation of the banjo, that would last well into the 1900s, providing the foundation for how racial markets were created and segregated in musical genres. It is this important point on minstrelsy that provides more nuanced and racist depictions of Black invisibility in Appalachia. The insistence on a homogenous white culture in

¹² Conway, 7.

¹³ Phil Jamison, *Hoedowns, Reels, and Frolics: Roots and Branches of Southern Appalachian Dance* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2014), 10.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 5.

¹⁵ Conway, *African Banjo Echoes in Appalachia*, 11.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 90-4, 104-9.

the mountains is troubled by the existence of African traditions that also are ironically and wrongfully defined as Appalachian. The methods to ensure a belief of a white homogenous culture exists in both the marketing of the music as traditional white culture, and the insistence that white minstrels spread banjo playing methods in Appalachia as opposed to enslaved and free Blacks.¹⁷

The facilitation of popular culture via steamboats along the Ohio River which brought various people and cultures to somewhat remote places in Kentucky and West Virginia, does not fully account for the proliferation of documented banjo playing styles before their arrival.¹⁸ It was Black entertainers, who were often slaves, that played music and entertained the passengers on the boats with banjo picking and dancing. This indeed did help establish musical roots not only in the Appalachian region, but throughout the country as a link to the blues and jazz music of later generations.¹⁹ The presence of African American culture and its impact on music is found throughout the Appalachian region as well as the U.S. It is the significance of what the banjo was and later becomes that is largely ignored or under researched, leading to racist and class based beliefs on traditions that existed in Appalachia.²⁰ A prominent question asked by scholars is why the banjo was put down in favor of other musical instruments? Especially when, as demonstrated by Conway, the banjo represented some association with home and provided community expression to deal with the turmoil bestowed upon Black people.²¹ Epstein concludes that the banjo was an instrument to express unhappiness, quoting an enslaved Black man named Aaron, “why do prisoners sing in jails?...They sing to make pleasure for themselves, not to give

¹⁷ Jamison, *Hoedowns, Reels, and Frolics*, 12-3, 186-8.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 17

¹⁹ Conway, *African Banjo Echoes in Appalachia*, 25-26.

²⁰ Tony Thomas, “Why African Americans Put the Banjo Down,” in *Hidden in the Mix: The African American Presence in Country Music*, ed. Diane Pecknold (Durham: Duke University Press, 2013), 144.

²¹ Conway, *African Banjo Echoes in Appalachia*, 63.

vent to it.”²² Throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth century the banjo was a main stay on plantations providing music for slaves, and whites alike, to dance and sing to. The banjo was usually played by farmers, and were the only instruments allowed by white slave owners due to worries of a slave insurrection. They were often accompanied by fiddle players, of Celtic and British origin, which provides further evidence of the cross-cultural musical influences European-Americans and African Americans had on one another.²³ This is the first of many reasons, that cross-cultural influence and later exploitation led to many Black players putting down the banjo in favor of new music. While this may be true, the poignancy of cross-cultural opportunities to both appreciate and experiment with new sounds led to the prominence of new music such as ragtime, and later the blues.²⁴

The roots of supposed traditional European- American music were heavily influenced by Black banjo players and dances, continuing to shape the country music scene today. Ultimately, the banjo was put down in favor of the guitar for its cheaper price and problems making any money playing the banjo, although regardless of the instrument played, Black people found it nearly impossible to make a living in music because of the lack of any opportunity.²⁵ But aside from that, there are religious reasons, in which Blacks were attacked via Christian sentiment that the banjo and fiddle playing was the work of the devil.²⁶ This is something we see today in news media. Take for example Kanye West’s track “Jesus Walks” in which he criticizes racist institutions and police brutality through evangelical Christian teachings of Jesus’s love of everyone. West emphatically criticizes these Christian teachings with the insistence that Jesus

²² Dena J. Epstein, “The Folk Banjo,” 349.

²³ *Ibid.*, 73.

²⁴ Thomas, “Why African Americans Put the Banjo Down,” 146.

²⁵ *Ibid.*

²⁶ Conway, *African Banjo Echoes in Appalachia*, 76-8.

walks with all those oppressed, even those society pushes out. West, as well as many other rappers, have been continually called immoral, unless they harbor to a more friendly white Christian music as West did in 2019 with his album *Jesus is King*. Upon release, Fox News, a prominent opponent to rap and hip hop, covered it closely, with many praising its lyrics and Christian values.²⁷

This opens new avenues about the role of religion in music that many experienced. Jamison is keen to point out that local religious communities often rejected traditional dance and music suppressing what they viewed as “immorality or ungodliness.”²⁸ The idea of satanism relates back to early colonial roles of placing heavy religious emphasis on “saving” Black people. Thus, the religious attack on music is a form of racialization that directly attributes to the shaping of the musical genre. Although it may not have been the biggest reason why the banjo was put down, it certainly had an impact. These social pressures, along with the growing mockery of Black people via minstrel black-face performers, forced many to seek different forms of expression. In sum, the money they received for any music they made was not worth it. Record companies were not looking for old-time Black banjo players by the early 1920s, and most had already retired to the guitar in search of a greater opportunity in new styles. The banjo was also hard to play and sing with, as the timbre and pitch of the five-stringed banjo made it difficult for African Americans to sing certain songs that required a different pitch. Most of the songs were slow in nature, but the banjo offered a more frantic high pitched sound, making it difficult to harmonize and write certain types of music.²⁹ Around the same time string bands, and jazz clubs provided some of the better opportunities for Black people to make a living in the

²⁷ Caleb Parke, “Kanye West’s ‘Jesus Is King’ Album Finally Drops after Delays,” Text.Article, Fox News (Fox News, October 25, 2019), <https://www.foxnews.com/entertainment/kanye-west-jesus-is-king-album-songs>.

²⁸ Jamison, *Hoedowns, Reels, and Frolics*.

²⁹ Thomas, “Why African Americans Put the Banjo Down,” 157-8.

music industry. The gradual abandonment of the banjo by Blacks, and continued use by whites, leads to a distorted historical understanding that the banjo was from European-American roots, ignoring the racism that led to the abandonment.³⁰

This is not to diminish the banjo as an important watermark in the musical history of African Americans, particularly in Appalachia, but it is an important note on how misguided historical understandings can distort memories, even those of music. Indeed, much of the music that came from this era was established by white performers either through minstrelsy or targeted music industry exploitation via race records and hillbilly records at the expense of African Americans. The point here is not so much focused on the music industry that came from banjo playing, but rather the many ways Black artists looked elsewhere to create music due to the inability to make money from it. Therefore, there are two main unexplored themes as to why Blacks put down the banjo. The first of which is the organic development away from the banjo, both in music and innovation. As mentioned, the guitar offered a cheaper option to the banjo, but by the 1920s-30s the guitar was not only cheaper but a larger option with improved amplification that allowed for a richer sound and ultimately replaced the banjo in almost every market including dance numbers.³¹ The only place the banjo continued to survive was in small pockets in Appalachia. In Kentucky, North Carolina, and Virginia these banjo traditions and songs carried on, although to a lesser extent. Eventually, the pressure of money and societal taste forced many whites in Appalachia to retire the banjo as well.³² The fading of the banjo is heavily attributed to the workings of the market which sought to sell specific music to Black and white

³⁰ Ibid. Karl Hagstrom Miller, *Segregating Sound: Inventing Folk and Pop Music in the Age of Jim Crow* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010).

³¹ Thomas, "Why African Americans Put the Banjo Down," 149.

³² Fuzz Hairston, Medicine Shows in 40s and 50s, Magnetic Tape Reel, January 16, 1977, <https://dla.acaweb.org/digital/collection/Ferrum/id/260/rec/1>.

consumers. As the market began to struggle selling banjo records, the prominence of Black banjo players shrunk, but this can also be attributed to the availability of Black old-time music. Consequently, Black people did not want to buy white string-band old-time music because they could not buy Black old-time music.³³ Importantly, the primary faces of banjo players that African Americans were exposed to were Black performers who played jazz, rag-time, and dance orchestras.³⁴ Throughout the early twentieth century Black string bands and the development Black minstrel shows operated as a reversal of white stereotypes of Black culture.³⁵ Many prominent Black musicians worked in Black minstrel, but the abandonment of the banjo was predicated on an escape of the past terror of slavery, Jim Crow segregation, and the need to sing new songs and make a living.³⁶

Nostalgia of racism from European-Americans kept the banjo alive and lucrative among certain white demographics. The consolidation of bluegrass and banjo picking by the likes of Earl Scruggs incorporated tenets of jazz, blues, and his famous three-finger banjo picking style. This resurgence of the banjo was not established in most other genres of music, as people were listening to rock and roll, blues, jazz, and country. The saturation of white banjo plays led to numerous false stereotypes of the banjo being a “hillbilly” instrument from the Appalachian region.³⁷ Again, I must assert that the banjo is an African instrument that found its home throughout the South and eventually became heavily linked with the Appalachian region because of the prominence of players. The banjo was abandoned by Blacks because “the constant struggle between African Americans and a hostile dominant society and culture creates a need

³³ Thomas, “Why African Americans Put the Banjo Down,” 150.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 152.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 153. Miller, *Segregating Sound*, 192.

³⁶ Thomas, “Why African Americans Put the Banjo Down,” 154-61.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 162.

for black music makers to produce music that speaks to specific needs and historical experience.”³⁸ Alternatively, it was used by Blacks to resist slavery and oppression, to hold on to culture and community, and as that changed so did the music.³⁹ This is apparent in the history of banjo music, which was once thought vile and barbarous, only to later be accepted as a staple of bluegrass and country enjoyed by the masses and misrepresented as white music.⁴⁰ White people have always heavily criticized and denounced music from Black artists before assimilating it into their own culture. A continuation of this pattern of complete control by white supremacy makes the decision to create new music and move away from the vortex of white capital an easier one, knowing it will also be commercialized for the benefit of whites. In essence, the development of new vernaculars is necessary to declare musical and personal independence from the systems that aim to maintain control and extract.⁴¹

Black-face Minstrelsy and Misconceptions

Locating the origin of anything, let alone a historically popular musical genre, is difficult and inherently impossible. New discoveries are made about who collaborated with whom and why these decisions were made are up for interpretation due to the lack of concrete archival records of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Creating an archival record of all the varied connections and new discoveries in minstrelsy, bluegrass, and hip hop, is not a task this chapter attempts. Instead, through an abbreviated history and analysis of minstrelsy and the music industry, new inroads can be made in unraveling race relations and offer a road forward.

³⁸ Ibid., 164.

³⁹ Conway, 83.

⁴⁰ Ibid. Thomas, “Why African Americans Put the Banjo Down.” Tricia Rose, *Black Noise: Rap Music and Black Culture in Contemporary America* (Hanover: Wesleyan University Press, 1994).

⁴¹ Russell Potter, *Spectacular Vernaculars: Hip-Hop and the Politics of Postmodernism*, SUNY Series in Postmodern Culture (New York: SUNY Press, 1995).

Examining the discographies and history of musicians continue to announce new patterns. Take, for instance, records with cross racial musicians not being included on the cover of the record.⁴² One can infer, “*aha racism in the music industry,*” which may be true, but this is never the whole story. Often individuals may not have been available to take pictures for the record, or they did not want to be on the cover, or maybe it is blatant racism. Taking a step back it does seem suspicious that usually white men were used on these covers to replace Black artists and not the other way around. Without concrete evidence of these events, and contradictory personal accounts of that day, one can both infer racism, while simultaneously addressing it as a misunderstanding. Contrary to this, these events viewed as blatant racism disguised via white narrative links directly to the understanding that companies often concealed the race of their artists to sell more records.⁴³ Importantly, the history of the banjo, minstrelsy, blues, jazz, bluegrass, country, and hip hop must be examined through various lenses and with attention to small details as to why certain music became popular and what can be inferred from these decisions.

These situations are not exclusive to music, as much history has been lost, ignored or unrecorded, but music provides accounts of both resistance and oppression of these lost histories that must be acknowledged. This is the nature of the many conflicting accounts of music and history that came from the mountains, and much of the reason that problems of racism, through the ignorance of whiteness, persist. The connections that are made, however, provide poignant reminders of the early days of blues and bluegrass. They provide a translucent image, but not always the exact thoughts of an artist or a precise documentation of the early musical scene.

⁴² Patrick Huber, “Black Hillbillies: African American Musicians on Old-Time Records, 1924-1932,” in *Hidden in the Mix: The African American Presence in Country Music*, ed. Diane Pecknold (Durham: Duke University Press, 2013), 46-50.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 49.

What is recorded is the period in which minstrelsy, blues, and bluegrass became extremely popular. This history is of utmost importance to any project on solidarity through music, because of the racial and class implications that take place. Another point of emphasis is the insistence on music not belonging to or defining groups of people, but instead understood as a form of expression that evolved in a certain environment. In other words, calling something Appalachian would initiate similar fatalistic traps that color writers and politicians espoused for a “needy” people. The goal is not to romanticize the past, but to tell its story and analyze the political and social ramifications of it. Thus, the music should not be heard as a fatalistic moniker of expression of a people that need to be saved from their own doing. Reversing those fatalistic narratives of trapped individuals, towards those who impose them is the primary task of this section.

The history of minstrelsy is both an intriguing and damning mark on this musical history. Beginning around the 1830s, whites were beginning to pick up the banjo playing styles of Black slaves and apprenticed with them to learn how to play. Karl Hagstrom Miller describes minstrelsy as shows that “depicted southern slaves happy in their bondage and free African Americans unfit for citizenship.”⁴⁴ This was one of the first times in US history ideas of musical authenticity was made, as white, black faced minstrels became the primary mode of learning about Black culture for whites.⁴⁵ It was also the primary method for city people to learn about rural life, which coincided with the arrival of color writers throughout the Appalachian region. Early minstrels promoted problematic understandings of the region on the stage, where they also acted out their racial curiosity and hatred of Blacks. There was a curiosity, but also a major

⁴⁴ Miller, *Segregating Sound*, 4.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 5-6.

untapped market that would eventually lead to the music norms consistent with today. Minstrels, before minstrel shows became widespread and highly popular, would ride on horseback singing songs they heard from enslaved Blacks, which eventually led to blackface and mimicry of Black dialects and music.⁴⁶ This is the beginning of what theorist Jennifer Stoeber terms the “sonic color line.” Stoeber’s work extensively examines the various ways in which white singers, songwriters, and others, imitate Black voice to mock or exert notions of race and class. This is particularly illuminating in the early days of blues and jazz, where white singers would often imitate the pitches of Black singers to sell more albums via copying or stealing a particular sound.⁴⁷ Even more pressing are the early days of black faced minstrelsy, and how it impacted the trajectory of Black resistance in musical form.

The fascination with Black musical tradition by whites demonstrates both a factor of respect and control. It demonstrates respect through the process of learning the banjo from enslaved Black players via apprenticeships, while also establishing a nature of control via class and race relations. In many ways it is telling that those enslaved were teaching whites how to play the banjo, creating a field to exploit and a continuation of Black otherness once the domain is wholly occupied by white performers. What minstrelsy demonstrates is how white supremacy exerts itself in the musical field. Black visibility becomes a side show, a mocking derogatory statement of racial superiority, all while dealing with class and racial insecurities the white minstrel may have.⁴⁸ Many people around the country were first exposed to Black, Appalachia,

⁴⁶ Conway, *African Banjo Echoes*, 85.

⁴⁷ Jennifer Lynn Stoeber, *The Sonic Color Line: Race and the Cultural Politics of Listening* (New York: NYU Press, 2016).

⁴⁸ Robert C. Toll, *Blacking Up: The Minstrel Show in Nineteenth Century America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1974).

Irish, and plantation living through black face minstrelsy.⁴⁹ The jokes told, the caricatures of Black men as simple, happy, and in need of a caretaker, were quickly emmeshed into American culture as factual. A rationalized racial caste was put in place on that stage through absurd characterizations of Black people, and this comforted whites. Recalling David Roediger, Blacks were made worse than whites on that stage, establishing white superiority. This was supplemented by the academic field strengthening the folklore behind minstrelsy, with many during that time claiming that minstrelsy was an authentic depiction of Black life.⁵⁰ Importantly, white minstrels were heavily influenced by African American folklore, and genuinely had to learn or absorb cultural practices from enslaved Blacks. This is not to say it was done with utmost respect, as minstrelsy was often a comical depiction of Black life to entertain whites at the expense of Blacks. Despite this, white, black faced minstrelsy provides an understanding of how “unknown” cultures that crossed with European American musical tenets such as fiddling were presented and commodified.⁵¹

The first white minstrels truly were musical apprentices to Blacks, and often spent a year or two gathering songs and learning the instruments. But what other choice did enslaved Blacks have? Refuse? Minstrelsy poignantly illustrates racial control and problematic assessments of early historical accounts. It was not until Thomas Dartmouth Rice that minstrelsy turned into a commercially successful show. Rice would sometimes play songs and imitate Black dance for

⁴⁹ Ibid., 270-1. For more on the many shows and examples of blackface minstrelsy see, Richard Hughes, “Minstrel Music: The Sounds and Images of Race in Antebellum America,” *The History Teacher* 40, no. 1 (2006): 27–43. Brian Roberts, *Blackface Nation: Race, Reform, and Identity in American Popular Music, 1812-1925* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2017). Robert C. Toll, “The Grand Transformation: Minstrelsy After The Civil War,” in *Blacking Up: The Minstrel Show in Nineteenth Century America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1974), 134–59.

⁵⁰ Miller, *Segregating Sound*, 6-7.

⁵¹ Conway, *African Banjo Echoes* 87-8.

upwards of six hundred dollars a night across Europe in the 1830s.⁵² Creating the now infamous “Jim Crow” act, Rice took the stage across Europe mimicking, often degrading, and perpetuating harmful racial attitudes. These dances, often performed by enslaved and free Blacks as well, captivated white audiences with the immense amount of skill and talent it took. William Henry Lane, the first Black man to perform in minstrel shows, brought in the banjo and tambourine earning him immense fame, but no money or freedom to live on.⁵³

The beginning of banjo transmission began in the early 1840s and developed in the early music industry as Irish and English folk tunes but with distinct rhythmic patterns independent from typical European sources. The interaction between enslaved Blacks, Native American musical sources and white minstrels were “likely to be the results of the banjo’s influence upon white folk music and minstrelsy.”⁵⁴ Throughout the history of the music industry it is apparent that this musical interaction led to one-sided profit for white performers and a development of an industry that sought to segregate sounds based on these profits. Minstrelsy provides a clear understanding of how important the role music is in shaping regional, class, and race relations. The “Jim Crow” song popularized by Rice was drawn from African American folk and made popular via dance and song as opposed to musical accompaniment. Within Black tradition, the “Jim Crow” song, and often the banjo, was used prior to Rice’s involvement in the song. Rice learned the song from an enslaved Black who would dance and sing “Jim Crow”, who in Black song and dance was often portrayed as a trickster. Thus, “the apocryphal foundation myth...encapsulates well minstrelsy’s transformation into an overwhelmingly racist form of

⁵² Ibid., 89-92.

⁵³ Ibid., 93-5.

⁵⁴ Ibid., 96.

popular entertainment.”⁵⁵ The “Jim Crow” song and character was persistent in its role, shaping core attitudes about the happy complicit slave, and that the slave would do anything the master demanded.⁵⁶ It was not until 1840, after many years of apprenticeship, that the banjo was played by white minstrels on stage, furthering the impact that African banjo tradition had on popular entertainment. The early minstrel groups such as the Virginia Minstrels relied heavily on African- American tradition for the use of the banjo, which was still an unfamiliar instrument. Joel Sweeney was the first to popularize the banjo in minstrelsy during the 1840s and was a highly proficient banjo player from present day West Virginia. Sweeney apprenticed under a Black instructor and was likely taught and raised by African American banjo players on his family’s plantation.⁵⁷ His brother, Sam, was equally as talented, garnering great respect from northerners who made up a large portion of the minstrel market. This led to further experimentation combining the banjo with Celtic traditional instruments such as the fiddle and popularizing the minstrel band.⁵⁸

Eric Lott describes the early minstrel shows as a racist curiosity stemming from white men “blacking up” and replicating what they believed as Black culture.⁵⁹ These skits and plays stalled the development of Black public art and political participation and constructed more social and economic roadblocks for Black communities. Black-face minstrels “offered a way to play with collective fears of a degraded and threatening- and male- Other while at the same time

⁵⁵ Karen Sotiropoulos, *Staging Race: Black Performers in Turn of the Century America* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2006), 21.

⁵⁶ Conway, *African Banjo Echoes*, 98-101.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 104-9.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 110-2. Hans Nathan, “The Performance of the Virginia Minstrels,” in *Inside the Minstrel Mask: Readings in Nineteenth-Century Blackface Minstrelsy*, ed. Annemarie Bean, James V. Hatch, and Brooks McNamara (Hanover: Wesleyan University Press, 1996), 35–42.

⁵⁹ Eric Lott, “Blackface and Blackness: The Minstrel Show in American Culture,” in *Inside the Minstrel Mask: Readings in Nineteenth-Century Blackface Minstrelsy*, ed. Annemarie Bean, James V. Hatch, and Brooks McNamara (Hanover: Wesleyan University Press, 1996), 3-5.

maintaining some symbolic control over them.”⁶⁰ Black-faced minstrelsy was a mediator between class, race, and cultural conflicts all packaged in the concept of masculinity. Blackness was produced in these shows, a cultural construction of how whites viewed Blacks, or rather how they wanted to view them.⁶¹ There was then a clear division between a reliance on Black culture and the representation of it on the stage. Minstrelsy sought to disguise Blackness and became a central site for the political struggle of representation, conflicted messaging, and cultural domination.⁶²

By the mid to late nineteenth century, many of the black-face minstrel tunes were extremely popular and provides evidence of a reliance on Black folk tunes, the banjo, Black cultures, and most importantly the creation of violent Black stereotypes. Minstrelsy was a pop culture icon, fulfilling the white understanding of the happy slave with black-face performances and exaggerated movements and speech that established a lower status. Comic skits were now becoming extremely popular and replacing the original Black heritage songs, or as W.E.B Du Bois would call them, “sorrow songs,” with hyperbolized caricatures of Black life to ease class and race tensions.⁶³ Around the time of the Civil War, growing worries of preserving the union began to grip northern minstrel shows which began to have contradictory shows that showed happy plantation slaves as well as the cruelties of slavery. Ironically, but to no surprise, post-emancipation only increased the volatile attitude towards Blacks, as northern minstrels would

⁶⁰ Lott, “Blackface and Blackness,” 13.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 25-6. See also: Eric Lott, *Love and Theft: Blackface Minstrelsy and the American Working Class*, 20th ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013).

⁶² Lott, “Blackface and Blackness,” 26.

⁶³ W.E.B. Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk by W. E. B. Du Bois: With a Critical Introduction by Patricia H. Hinchey* (1903: Bloomfield: Myers Education Press, 2018), XIV of Sorrow Songs. W.E.B. Du Bois, “The Black Worker,” in *Blacks In Appalachia*, ed. Edward J. Cabbell and William H. Turner (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1985), 147–58.

continue to present Blacks as happy serving whites and staying in the South.⁶⁴ This led to Black minstrels taking the stage and providing a voice of their own around the end of the nineteenth century. This created a market for authentic Black music and presentation and allowed for talented Black musicians to find their footing in an industry built on Black subjugation. During the late nineteenth century more Black minstrels were taking the stage, both manipulating and furthering Black otherness. These early Black performers faced many problems to make art and political statements the way they envisioned it, while also trying to appease a white audience.⁶⁵ Karen Sotiropoulos' work, *Staging Race: Black Performers in Turn of the Century America* provides a rich understanding of what these performers meant not just to minstrelsy, but to future Black performers in white America.

One prominent Black minstrel was Will Marion Cook, a classically trained musician who had the talent to become an orchestra composer but decided instead to write for the minstrel stage to combat racial stereotypes and white, black-faced minstrels. Cook wanted to reclaim the many sorrow songs used in black-face minstrel shows as a mocking caricature show and wanted to make these shows authentic to Black life in the U.S.⁶⁶ Very popular at the turn of the twentieth century, "coon songs" enabled Cook with an opportunity to create music that reinterpreted a Black past in a political and aesthetic way. Cook experienced racism and violence from whites throughout his life and decided he would use his music to combat racial prejudice. He was angry that so many Black people had internalized the racist depictions of Black life as fact, and much like Frantz Fanon, he wanted to change it.⁶⁷ Cook wrote many songs early on, with the hope of

⁶⁴ Conway, *African Banjo Echoes*, 115.

⁶⁵ Karen Sotiropoulos, *Staging Race: Black Performers in Turn of the Century America* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2006), 2.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 81-3.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 84-6.

opening a Black opera, which he did in 1898 to huge success, but featuring black-faced minstrels and operating less as an opera and more like a typical minstrel show. Despite this, the huge success of his show *Clorindy* launched his career as a music writer. Cook set out to write authentic Black music, and the labels associated with the songs he wrote were simply labels placed on them by the publishing industry.⁶⁸ Cook's music noted as ragtime, was met with commercial success, but panned by critics "as a "low" form of music", and despite it raising many issues of race, gender, and class Cook had to cater to white interests to sell it.⁶⁹ The "coon songs" evokes a racial derision towards Blacks, but during the Civil War it was used to describe a country person. The stage provided whites a place to work out this term and deride Black people in the process. By the twentieth century "coons" was the acceptable term for Blacks, and "coon songs" were never distinguished from ragtime, they were a part of the American vernacular. This presented very little opportunity for Black musicians to make any other form of music but Cook demonstrated he could do it on his terms. Cook's songs contained commentary on Black life and challenged the vicious violent stereotypes of Blacks with stories that challenged this and encouraged Black public participation to revolt against whites in numbers.⁷⁰ In "Who Dat Say Chicken in Dis Crowd?" Cook critiques elite Black leadership "that spent so much time instructing African Americans how to act that they missed addressing the real problems of land ownership and the hunger that might cause someone to steal."⁷¹

Much like current hip hop songs like Ice Cube's "Why we Thugs" released in 2006, Cook is directly critiquing not only white society and their inability to separate Black life and comedy, but also the elite Black leadership that lambasts Blacks for not addressing the problems of

⁶⁸ Ibid., 87-9.

⁶⁹ Ibid., 88-9.

⁷⁰ Ibid., 90-6.

⁷¹ Ibid., 97.

homelessness and hunger.⁷² Unsurprisingly, white reviewers understood these performances not as a critique or as an artistic expression against racism, but as a truly authentic Black experience, echoing white sentiments on current hip hop.⁷³ White reporters reverted to degrading stereotypes to refer to Black minstrel performers who they interviewed, revealing their own racial anxieties about changing current racial relations.⁷⁴ In sum, whites did not want to believe these shows were anything but comedic depictions of Black life and would label any act of resistance with racial monikers to deter listeners of anything but white supremacists' views of Black life. Even Black critics, like W.E.B. Du Bois, spoke out against the commercialism of these ragtime tunes, claiming it robbed the music of its blackness.⁷⁵ This is similar to Tricia Rose's claim that commodified Black cultural practices lose its original origin, or it is simply taken for granted within the public, much like the history of the banjo.⁷⁶ Consequently, years later Rose argues that hip hop as a genre is in turmoil from its commercialization, but the attention that the stereotypes and harmful tropes receive take away from the good that hip hop does for the Black community.⁷⁷ Cook, like Rose, understood these songs and melodies as in line with Black cultural practices because of the syncopation of the verses and the initiation of call and response with audience members. Cook sought to advance Black art, not derail it, and his performances navigated the rigorous terrain of white racist vernacular, inverting white expectations by often having Black men in suits with groomed hair and different dialects than the stereotypical dialect

⁷² Ice Cube, *Why We Thugs*, YouTube Music (Virgin, 2006).

⁷³ Collin Stutz, "Kendrick Lamar Responds to Geraldo Rivera: 'Hip-Hop Is Not the Problem, Our Reality Is,'" Article, *Billboard*, July 2, 2015, <https://www.billboard.com/articles/columns/the-juice/6620035/kendrick-lamar-responds-geraldo-rivera-alright-bet-awards>.

⁷⁴ Karen Sotiropoulos, *Staging Race*, 100-3.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 103-5.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 100-5. Tricia Rose, *Black Noise: Rap Music and Black Culture in Contemporary America* (Hanover: Wesleyan University Press, 1994), 20-5. This claim is also made by Amiri Baraka and in Leroi Jones, *Blues People: Negro Music in White America* (New York: Harper Perennial, 1963).

⁷⁷ Tricia Rose, *The Hip Hop Wars: What We Talk About When We Talk About Hip Hop--and Why It Matters* (New York: Basic Books, 2008), 261-73.

black-face minstrels spoke in. Black performers used these dialects to talk back against racism, conveying a tone, directing the conversation to Black folks, and appeasing white audiences.⁷⁸

Black performers understood these dialects as harmful for progress against racial injustice; however, to be heard on the stage they used the same tenets and strategies that trapped them to make a point, one that whites did not, and would not, acknowledge as anything but comedy.⁷⁹

In contrast, white minstrels only looked to capitalize on the “coon” craze, and further the racial stereotypes to increase the revenue from white owned publishing businesses. In 1904, Cook and several other Black minstrels broke away from these white publishing houses, founding the Black-owned Gotham-Attucks Music company.⁸⁰ By 1910, more Black composers were speaking out against their mistreatment by major record companies and white publishing houses like Columbia, which many Black critics claimed stole jobs from Black men and women and gave them to less talented white musicians.⁸¹ This allowed white artists to further racialize the genre, asserting whiteness in Black written songs and performances. Thus, the reclamation of some of the early Black minstrel songs were repurposed for a southern heritage that excluded them. A southern heritage that was ironically and wholly dependent upon the Black musicians they sought to erase. Cook now had full control over who he hired and how Black artists were depicted, and instead of the black-faced caricatures used to promote the shows, he published images of well-groomed Black actors in formal wear. The popularity of the music was not in question, but distribution for Black minstrels was difficult in a white marketplace. Despite this, by 1914 many Black artists continued to push back against modern racial stereotypes and tried to

⁷⁸ Karen Sotiropoulos, *Staging Race*, 106-15.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 116. Robert C. Toll, *Blacking Up: The Minstrel Show in Nineteenth Century America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1974), 244-54.

⁸⁰ Karen Sotiropoulos, *Staging Race*, 117-9.

⁸¹ Miller, *Segregating Sound*, 137-8.

represent Black life with their art. Cook, like his counterpart W.E.B. Du Bois, was very well educated but he differed drastically in his approach to fight racial injustice. Cook wholeheartedly believed that “racial progress lay in recognizing and celebrating Black identity,” a celebration of Black music that would progress into jazz and blues, and later soul and hip hop.⁸² Despite the justified Black criticism of Black minstrels, what cannot be understated is “in the business of fantasy, dreams, and imagination, and coming of age with the rise of Jim Crow, turn-of-the-century Black performers envisioned a better place.”⁸³

The problems with minstrelsy, however, remained and further established harmful racial understandings and a degraded, commercialized, stereotype-informed Black culture enterprise. Early on, minstrelsy was a way for white farmers, slave owners, and common men to play tunes and dances learned from enslaved Blacks and whites alike. However, as Sotiropoulos and Lott described the shift from apprentice to master allowed white minstrels to play songs that pined for the old southern institutions of slavery, all while deriding Black cultural tradition. Many classic minstrel tunes provided listeners with an image of a home lost, and sung songs that celebrated slavery during the years after the Civil War. Songs such as “The Old Home Ain’t What it Used to Be” (1874) by C.A. White provides clear evidence of this.⁸⁴ The first two stanzas depict a longing for slaves in the field, as it reads “Oh the old home ain’t what it used to be/ The banjo and the fiddle has gone/ And no more you hear the darkies singing/ Among the sugar cane and

⁸² Karen Sotiropoulos, *Staging Race*, 121. W.T. Lhamon, Jr., “Ebery Time I Wheel About I Jump Jim Crow: Cycles of Minstrel Transgression from Cool White to Vanilla Ice,” in *Inside the Minstrel Mask: Readings in Nineteenth-Century Blackface Minstrelsy*, ed. Annemarie Bean, James V. Hatch, and Brooks McNamara (Hanover: Wesleyan University Press, 1996), 276.

⁸³ Karen Sotiropoulos, *Staging Race*, 242.

⁸⁴ Conway, *African Banjo Echoes*, 114-5.

corn.”⁸⁵ Minstrel tunes provide a direct link to the spawn of ballads and “coon songs” that praised and upheld racial segregation and Jim Crow legal statutes.

This is a shift from strictly pandering to a market based on race and class anxiety to a market looking to romanticize the Black other and gendered nostalgia, demonstrating the immediate impact these songs had on the American conscious.⁸⁶ The banjo songs and dances of enslaved Blacks played on plantations told stories of African diaspora and provided a voice for those who were unable to speak for themselves. In many ways these banjo songs are a window to the past that have immediate repercussions on the future, but these songs have been altered, mocked, and ridiculed by white institutions.⁸⁷ Clearly troubling, it is no wonder that Cook and many other Black performers took to the stage to combat these stereotypes and provide Black musical resistance, but to what avail? In sum, minstrelsy is best understood as the first of many commercialized stereotypical depictions of violent, uneducated, othered, and needy Black people. Despite Black performers’ best efforts to confront them, they often fell victim to white supremacists’ commercial interests. Although, this did not stop Black resistance against racial injustice and inequality. By flipping the minstrel formula, Blacks could now hear themselves on stage, and despite the problems associated with minstrel, it provided avenues for success and resistance in the music industry.⁸⁸ In chapter three, I examine further Black musical cultures that resisted white capitalist expectations through jazz, blues, soul, and hip hop.

⁸⁵ C.A White, *The Old Home Ain't What It Used to Be*, Sheet Music (Boston: White-Smith Music Publishing Co., 1872).

⁸⁶ Miller, *Segregating Sound*, 34-5.

⁸⁷ Conway, *African Banjo Echoes*. Robert Cantwell, *Bluegrass Breakdown: The Making of the Old Southern Sound* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2003), 48.

⁸⁸ Miller, *Segregating Sound*, 193-5.

Through the lens of Judith Butler and Eric Lott, Pamela Fox describes minstrelsy and early romance ballads as a creation of a racial mask that gives white singers and minstrels the ability to construct their own identity through performance. It allows for whites to live the life of Black folks, while also maintaining a distance and disavowing that identity at the expense of Black people.⁸⁹ The homogeneous myth of a white Appalachia stands as the most damning of the region, as it forgets the many great musical talents of Black men and women that continue to inhabit the region. Erasure of Blackness in music furthers racist depictions of Black life, and the myths of a pure white culture. The development of new genres was predicated on these beliefs of anti-blackness. It should be noted that the music so closely attributed to the likes of old-time and bluegrass legend Bill Monroe is rooted in African tradition and evokes an understanding of a past that is gone.⁹⁰

A more complete understanding of Appalachian banjo development is then important, not as a vindication of Appalachian anti-blackness, but as a history from the region itself. Demonstrating inconsistencies and providing alternative histories to a basin of misinformation already present about Appalachian identity provides a framework and potential avenues for a musical moment of solidarity. This is never assured, and relies on reckoning with the past, but with this recognition there may be a path to a better future. Conway's argument that banjo techniques arose in Appalachia prior to minstrelsy involvement in the region can provide this path. Examples such as Uncle Dave Macon and Hobart Smith, both white, provide evidence that white minstrels did not shape their playing styles, rather their family traditions did.⁹¹ Macon, while likely influenced by minstrelsy in some ways, was born in 1870 and played a down

⁸⁹ Pamela Fox, *Natural Acts: Gender, Race, and Rusticity in Country Music* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2009), 8-10.

⁹⁰ Cantwell, *Bluegrass Breakdown*, 47-8.

⁹¹ Conway, *African Banjo Echoes*, 123-5.

stroking clawhammer style in 1885, a time when down stroking was not played by minstrels for around twenty years. Similarly, Smith had learned from his father and played with Tom Ashley who had learned the down stroking technique from his aunt, with whom he would travel the mountains playing at shows. Musical traditions seemed to carry more weight in the mountains than minstrel shows, and “apparently the scholars are using the term “minstrelsy” to include southern folk musicians”, completely ignoring and de-signifying the importance of regional traditions and slavery in the region.⁹² Many minstrel shows did not reach the mountains, and those that did were on showboats that were constantly moving from place to place, making the transfer of playing styles unlikely in such a short period of time. Since banjo playing did not appear in minstrelsy until 1840, and players like Joel Sweeney from the Appalachian Mountains were playing before then, the held belief that minstrelsy alone created these mountain styles is likely false.⁹³ The records on this subject are sparse, but indications are that Appalachian whites, largely isolated from minstrelsy markets, learned from enslaved or free Blacks in the region. Blacks in the North Carolina and Virginia Piedmont regions were playing this down stroking style in the late eighteenth century and continue to do so in some capacity today. It is far more likely that mountain whites picked these styles up from them as opposed to the minstrel shows, which did not appear until 1840.

This narrative of banjo heritage is in direct association with the Black invisibility of Appalachia, as many scholars inadvertently silence the voices that created the music and erase crucial histories and traditions along the way. Banjo playing Blacks lived all throughout mountain trading and migration routes between 1799 to 1849.⁹⁴ Hobart Smith documents

⁹² Ibid., 123-7.

⁹³ Ibid., 131-3.

⁹⁴ Ibid., 139-41. Cecelia Conway, “Black Banjo Songsters in Appalachia,” *Black Music Research Journal* 23, no. 1/2 (2003): 149–66.

learning from a young age from Black musicians because, like Sweeney before him, it was the way to learn how to play.⁹⁵ While history and records are less clear, it is more persuasive to say that white mountain musicians learned the banjo from Black banjo players as opposed to minstrels who played a completely different style by the Civil War. If minstrelsy truly influenced mountain whites, they would not play the down stroking style common among enslaved Blacks, but rather a picking style popularized in the years 1865-1880. This combination of white and Black music created highly influential sounds that remain popular in certain areas of Appalachia, despite the racism that came from them.

As lynching of Black men was occurring frequently in the 1890s, at around two to three a day in the South, these minstrel songs and folk tunes were not just mild amusement. They were grounded in institutions of racial violence, and both were entertainment for whites.⁹⁶ As Cook demonstrated this was a market for whites to free themselves from any association with Blackness. Minstrelsy was a way to enact violence and attempt to sterilize its racist history. This history of white banjo players learning from Blacks enables a different history in the region. Although “coon songs” crassly assaulted Black people, many Black musicians used the craze to shift the narrative and create an alternative identity. In sum, Black musicians used the “coon songs” to create new understandings and flip the current narrative of Black subservience through song. Songs such as the “The Bully Song” and “I Got Mine” provided Black listeners stories of triumph over white oppression, whether it was victory over the police or just surviving an encounter with a white man.⁹⁷ These songs helped challenge current misconceptions of Black life, while also providing income that could prevent long hours in poor conditions. Music was

⁹⁵ Conway, *African Banjo Echoes*, 142.

⁹⁶ Miller, *Segregating Sound*, 42.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 46-7.

often an escape from the mines or hard labor in Appalachia, or some of the social restrictions present during Jim Crow. By the beginning of the twentieth century, most Black musicians stopped playing the banjo in favor of the guitar and other instruments due to limited opportunities available to them. The growing political, social, and economic oppression exerted by Jim Crow makes this far more understandable.⁹⁸ By the 1920s music genres were continually becoming more segregated to make profit, and further racial boundaries.

Banjos in Appalachia: Race and Hillbilly records in Modern America

How does one reconcile with the history of the banjo and its musical importance in the region through racial modes of exploitation? Alan Lomax falsely claims that all banjo playing from whites, in Appalachia and elsewhere, can be directly attributed to minstrelsy and its wide reach in the mid nineteenth century.⁹⁹ Other factors, such as widespread migration and the construction of railroads, had some impact on the transmission of the banjo to white folks around the country, but for Lomax, minstrelsy was the primary factor. Contrary to this, the banjo styles, such as the clawhammer style, were likely directly passed from Black to white musicians in the mountains. Many scholars believe that medicine shows, minstrel performances, and northern banjo players passed this technique on to players in Appalachia. According to Conway, however, the shows Alan Lomax cites did not make it into the mountains, only having stopped in Charleston, South Carolina in 1841. These shows are likely responsible for the dissemination of the banjo broadly but were not as influential in the mountains.¹⁰⁰ Of course with limited documentation, it is difficult to say with absolute certainty that the techniques played in the mountains were not

⁹⁸ Conway, *African Banjo Echoes*, 146, 157-9, 236.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 120-1.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 122-3, 189.

influenced in a meaningful way by minstrel shows, but it is more likely that mountain whites, given what we know, learned from free and enslaved Blacks in the region. The creation of race and “hillbilly” music makes this history even harder to sort through. But music, much like social and political institutions, was strategically being divided based on race and regional demographics in the early twentieth century.

Similar events are found in the musical traditions of bluegrass, as is the case in Kentucky about Arnold Shultz and Travis-style thumb picking. Erika Brady presents the problems of contested origins of certain picking styles in bluegrass and popular worldwide music.¹⁰¹ Kennedy Jones had supposedly been playing his style for years before he met Arnold Shultz. Shultz, a Black man, is considered a musical legend in Kentucky and a master of many instruments, including the banjo and guitar. Brady illuminates the importance of musical exchange and collaboration, while also emphasizing the racial separation that occurred after jam sessions.¹⁰²¹⁰³ Importantly, Brady’s descriptions of the importance Blacks had in musical development provides evidence that there is not a full rejection of Black influence and importance in bluegrass and country, but rather a misunderstood history of events. Schultz’s name began to re-surface in the 1960s, some thirty years after his death, in conversations about his role in the creation of bluegrass. Bill Monroe, often regarded as the father of the genre, acknowledged Schultz’s influence but guarded his position as his own, pushing back against evidence that Schultz’s

¹⁰¹ Erika Brady, “Contested Origins: Arnold Shultz and the Music of Western Kentucky,” in *Hidden in the Mix: The African American Presence in Country Music*, ed. Diane Pecknold (Durham: Duke University Press, 2013), 100–118.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*, 110-3.

¹⁰³ Of note here is the peculiarity of interaction and separation of Black and white musicians. As Brady discusses that they would play together in the same room, but the Black man would eat or be alone in a separate room after. This emphasizes the role of race in music and while not discrediting Kennedy Jones for a certain style, would Shultz likely have been given the same benefit of the doubt?

picking style revolutionize old-time music in the 1920s.¹⁰⁴ This was around the same time that the music industry was beginning to promote race and old-time records for massive profit, emphasizing local sounds, and segregating them based on race.¹⁰⁵ Schultz was a prolific artist, playing in hillbilly bands across the South, as well as fingerstyle blues and jazz. He could do it all. His picking heavily influenced Kennedy Jones, who influenced Merle Travis, who influenced Chet Atkins, who then took this style to the world.¹⁰⁶

The forgotten importance of Schultz on the guitar picking of the likes of Travis and Atkins demonstrates both a profound sensitivity on the origins of a “southern” musical style, and an immediate illustration of the racial divide despite the similar sounds and the interracial musical culture that existed between Black and white artists in the south.¹⁰⁷ Music in the early 1900s was a place of exchange for both whites and Blacks in the mountains, although many conflicts did arise in musical contests. Schultz’s all-Black band, according to a local, “Boots” Fought, was by far the best band at this competition, but they lost the grand prize of fifty dollars and a radio recording to an all-white band in the early 1920s.¹⁰⁸ The racial dynamics in the music industry were clear to Black performers, but were never as visible to their white counterparts in Kentucky, who appreciated Black musicians but never fully admitted to their contributions to local musical styles.¹⁰⁹ One thing that is for certain as it pertains to origins of a picking style is how difficult it can be to prove or disprove who created what and whether it matters at all, especially when race is involved.

¹⁰⁴ Brady, “Contested Origins,” 102-4.

¹⁰⁵ Karl Miller, *Segregating Sound*, 185-6.

¹⁰⁶ Brady, “Contested Origins,” 106-7.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, 104-5. Karl Miller, *Segregating Sound*, 218-20.

¹⁰⁸ Brady, “Contested Origins,” 112.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, 113.

What is worth noting when examining mountain banjo origins and the development of musical genres is that “myths of origin offer only a reductionist illusion of certainty...though these myths in themselves can provide important clues to meaning and identity within communities of musicians and listeners.”¹¹⁰ Regardless of what can be proven about Black Appalachian banjo authenticity, it is important to discuss and examine the histories of musical exchange because of the power of untold narratives. The banjo and Black musical cultures present different stories, but these stories of Black authenticity have been, borrowing from Fox, masked under white exceptionalism of minstrelsy, hillbilly music and, later, country and bluegrass music in local places but also worldwide.

Importantly, the construction of identity, specifically in the creation of “hillbilly,” race, old-time, and later country music, is always linked to commercialism and the production of race and gender.¹¹¹ At the beginning of the twentieth century a musical color line was constructed, creating separate genres based on race. Race and old-time or “hillbilly” music were constructed to sell songs to specific demographics and are integral in understanding the history of Black suppression not only in the music industry but throughout the country.¹¹² Race music such as tin pan alley, blues and jazz targeted towards Blacks and other groups, and old-time, string band, or “hillbilly” music targeted the rural white population.¹¹³ These early racial musical meanings created very real consequences for Black people, as they are forced to redefine, re-establish, and challenge new mechanisms in the seemingly eternal struggle for justice, equality, and power. Race is very real, and music makes one astutely aware of this. For example, Ray Charles’ album “Modern Sounds in Country and Western Music” challenged the very label of Black or white

¹¹⁰ Ibid., 115.

¹¹¹ Fox, *Natural Acts*, 2-10.

¹¹² Miller, *Segregating Sound*, 11.

¹¹³ Ibid., 187.

music by incorporating country lyrics with jazz and blues rhythms. His ongoing understandings of how he identified himself musically is worth noting, especially since he drastically revitalized and changed a genre that did not want to identify him as a contributor. The continued reformations in African American musical cultures can be traced from the banjo to the music we hear today. Blacks were always given othered identities, whether they were enslaved, mocked on the minstrel stage, lynched, harshly sentenced in a court room or by the music they were and weren't allowed to play. As illustrated, Black people in this country have been, and are continually identified as, expendable, criminal, lower- class and exploitable others. These complex identifiers sought to rid Black musicians of their humanity, yet like Ray Charles, many refused to ever be defined by them.¹¹⁴ As discussed earlier, at the turn of the twentieth century “coon songs” jettisoned capitalist depictions of African Americans as violent and simple people in need of authority despite Black performers’ best efforts to separate from these monikers. The danger behind these songs is evident, as artists, usually in black-face, would promote white supremacy in the South, while also ironically enabling “hillbilly” stereotypes as backwards elsewhere in the country. In New York, these shows relied heavily on stereotypical understandings of Blacks while also shaping destructive images of white southerners.¹¹⁵

The success of this music led to the diaspora of multiple genres around the country in search of profit. Instances of whites performing Black composed music provides further evidence of the difficulty African Americans had in relation to song publishing in the early 1910s and 1920s.¹¹⁶ During this time music scouts were attempting to find new sounds and were

¹¹⁴ Ibid., 11-13. Diane Pecknold, “Making Country Modern: The Legacy of Modern Sounds in Country and Western Music,” in *Hidden in the Mix: The African American Presence in Country Music*, ed. Diane Pecknold (Durham: Duke University Press, 2013), 82–99.

¹¹⁵ Miller, *Segregating Sound*, 41, 120-2.

¹¹⁶ Ibid., 151.

intent on making money internationally. These Black performers created a market, and the selling of “ethnic” music became lucrative. In sum, “race and old-time records in part signified global marketing strategies coming home to roost.”¹¹⁷ Race records were born out of the benefit they would have for the white musical recording companies with new sounds of jazz and blues. Race and “hillbilly” records were created because music executives believed they needed to establish a local consumer base to sell the old-time tunes many rural whites identified with. Thus, race records were sold on a racially informed idea of a Black local consumer base, and “hillbilly” or old-time music followed suit with a target audience of rural whites.¹¹⁸ By separating the genres, companies made clear their intentions to uphold a racially segregated sound scape. Both categories went on to sell millions of records and inscribed American musical understanding, clearly diminishing the impact Blacks had on “hillbilly” music, and simply denoting any music outside of the “hillbilly” genre as race music. With the saturation of the phonograph recording industry occurring in the early 1900s, it is then no wonder why this occurred; the commercial industry had sold local music so well that they marketed and exploited whole groups of people. Consumers around the world, but especially in the locales the records were sold, would then hear these race and class stereotypes, likely confirming their beliefs. The shaping of the industry was based on the same philosophy that existed on the minstrel stages: racism and profit.

With Mamie Smith knocking down the door for Black musicians in the 1920s with massive sales of her blues album, record companies “could only imagine Black consumers as the embodiments of blackface stereotypes,” and they looked to market all their Black artists through

¹¹⁷ Ibid., 184.

¹¹⁸ Ibid., 186-95.

black-face advertisements to Black consumers.¹¹⁹ White singers now looked not to imitate Black composers, but to authenticate their beliefs through Black talent. The Black pioneers of blues and jazz were consistently trying to break into the industry to combat these harmful stereotypes of Black music and culture, only to realize myths and racial understandings were already firmly entrenched through the ears of white consumers. By 1923, the phonograph was reaching southern audiences, and Black songs and styles of the region were illustrated by the likes of Charlie Patton, who sang about hardships living there. The song “Down South Blues” provides the start of what would eventually become country and narratives of Black diaspora that would be lost to time.¹²⁰ Southern markets had been ignored in marketing local songs, as the same music sold worldwide was sold in the South as well. This led to the scouting of the South and the migration of song-writers from the Appalachian hills to record music in big cities. Musicians such as John Carson and Henry Whitter provided new avenues for profit away from their general pop music lists that appealed to southern audiences with their fiddle, banjo, and folk-song repertoire. Using blacksploitation, music companies opted to allow local business to advertise the music in local stores, again relying on Black minstrel imagery.

Contrary to this, record companies introduced old-time records as serious folklore and advertised the music with photos of well-dressed white men.¹²¹ In the mountains, however, record companies scouted talent that played music from an “older era.” In 1925 they began promoting “hillbilly” records in the South, and white southern musicians took notice. Partially embracing the stereotype, the industry began selling a hillbilly image and specific identities. These tracks were then sold to the masses as skits; like minstrel caricatures and cliches and

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 193.

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*, 196-7.

¹²¹ *Ibid.*, 205-11.

hillbilly humor was used to sell records to northern audiences “while assuring white southern audiences were in on the joke.”¹²² These old-time string bands became incredibly popular, and with this popularity, bands like the Skillet Lickers capitalized on the demand for “hillbilly” music, while also inverting the common stereotypes associated with “hillbillies.” They knew what they were doing and reminded the audience of their status as professionals.¹²³ The 1920s provide evidence of interracial and pop music in old-time catalogues, as whites were given much more freedom in the variety of music they recorded mainly because of Jim Crow segregation, the popularity of the blues, regional strategy, outdated beliefs of singers, and copyright control.¹²⁴ Black musicians could play only Black music, and despite evidence that suggests cultural crossover in the South and similar musical styles, industry executives pushed for distinct categories of music. Despite the many examples like The Memphis Jug Band, who played songs inspired by both blues and minstrel-tunes, companies attempted to keep these separate at all costs for fear of alienating consumers.¹²⁵

This is not to say that Black musicians were not in “hillbilly” records, they were, but it was rare. Tony Russel and Kip Lornell provide integral information via discography on the immense amount of recording that took place during the 1920s to the 1940s and how Black musicians carved out a place in old-time “hillbilly” records but also provided a base for later commercialization in country music.¹²⁶ Lornell provides key information on the role of gospel music in North Carolina, emphasizing the role Black artists have on old-time, or as it was called

¹²² Ibid., 212.

¹²³ Ibid., 214. Norman Cohen, “The Skillet Lickers: A Study of a Hillbilly String Band and Its Repertoire,” *The Journal of American Folklore* 78, no. 309 (1965): 229–44.

¹²⁴ Miller, *Segregating Sound*, 217.

¹²⁵ Ibid., 218-20.

¹²⁶ Tony Russell and Bob Pinson, *Country Music Records: A Discography, 1921-1942*, 1st edition (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004). Kip Lornell, *Virginia's Blues, Country, and Gospel Records, 1902-1943: An Annotated Discography* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1989).

in the 1920s , “hillbilly” music.¹²⁷ Lornell’s research reached my hometown of Martinsville, Virginia and Henry County, Virginia, which played host to influential Black banjo, fiddle, and guitar players such as Fuzz Hairston, Leonard Bowles, and Irvin Cook.¹²⁸ All of these men recall playing bluegrass and old-time music, hearing the many picking styles over the radio and at shows. Leonard Bowles recalled Black square dances in the 1980s, and most of these men played the banjo clawhammer style like the African griots before them.¹²⁹ The problem is that these stories are rarely, if ever, included in any history of the development of old-time, “hillbilly”, and later bluegrass and country music. Both problematic and reductionist, the history of musical development in the mountains also leaves out the role of gospel music in Black churches, and the influence this had on the blues, jazz, and later hip hop.¹³⁰ When addressing old-time country music, or “hillbilly” music in North Carolina and Virginia, Lornell asserts that Black rural music is an under researched and forgotten history that reveals “the problems and issues related to defining musical terms in the face of racial issues.”¹³¹

Cementing Lornell’s claim, only around one percent of the hillbilly records released before the 1930s featured Black artists, but at least twenty-two sessions were racially integrated between 1924-1933.¹³² Meaning very little of their influence resulted in recognition and/or payment. Patrick Huber’s argument that the music industry was not explicitly racializing acts and built on white supremacist monikers is misguided, because the music industry wanted to both

¹²⁷ Kip Lornell, “Old-Time Country Music in North Carolina and Virginia,” in *Hidden in the Mix: The African American Presence in Country Music*, ed. Diane Pecknold (Durham: Duke University Press, 2013), 171–90.

¹²⁸ *Ibid.*, 184-6.

¹²⁹ *Ibid.*, 187.

¹³⁰ Michael Eric Dyson, *Between God and Gangsta Rap: Bearing Witness to Black Culture* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996).

¹³¹ Lornell, “Old-Time Country Music,” 188-9.

¹³² Patrick Huber, “Black Hillbillies: African American Musicians on Old-Time Records, 1924-1932,” in *Hidden in the Mix: The African American Presence in Country Music*, ed. Diane Pecknold (Durham: Duke University Press, 2013), 21-22.

make money and continue the racial power relations eloquently described by Miller. The music industry sought to market “hillbilly” music as an authentic white music, free of Blackness, and doubled down on the false narratives of white homogeneity in the Appalachian region.

The music marketed to whites as old time tunes and “hillbilly” were many of the Black spirituals reworked from their Black origin and sold as authentic white music. The decades of musical interplay via banjo and other instruments between whites and Blacks had been completely whitewashed. Most Black musicians looked to other opportunities in the race music genre because it became far more difficult for Black artists to succeed making “hillbilly” tracks as opposed to jazz and blues. It is clear the amount of influence Black artists had on southern white artists, and despite racism and segregation, it was not unusual for crossover recordings; however, it was often hidden.¹³³ DeFord Bailey, a rare example, is the most well-known Black artist to feature in the hillbilly record label, as a renowned harmonica player and prominent feature in the Grand Ole Opry (country music’s biggest stage). Bailey was an outlier, but several Black string bands became popular and released records in the “hillbilly” market. For this to occur, record companies would often provide pseudonyms for Black bands and musicians to sell the record in both race and hillbilly genres.¹³⁴ Record companies in some instances placed white musicians on race records, which led to the Allen Brothers filing a lawsuit of \$250,000 against Columbia records for defamation.¹³⁵ Importantly, these categories meant to sell to specific demographics, usually sold across races they segregated. In other words, white people often bought race records and Blacks, to a lesser extent, bought old time records. In sum, people

¹³³ Huber, *Black Hillbillies*, 36-7.

¹³⁴ *Ibid.*, 45-7.

¹³⁵ *Ibid.*, 48.

bought what they wanted to hear despite the labels placed on the records.¹³⁶ Record companies wanted to make money, but executives did so through the institutions they knew, that of racism.

Race records were not a musical category or sound, rather “it defined the race of a musician...shaping the sounds they were able to make.”¹³⁷ The industry enforced its color line, only allowing Black musical executives to work with Black artists and restricting the mobility of Black artists to mostly blues records and later spirituals. Record companies enforced a color line by promoting the blues as pure Black music, severing connections with minstrelsy as genuine Black song.¹³⁸ This was not as true in the South, as the example of Papa Charlie Jackson demonstrates. Jackson’s blues songs, marketed as country blues, integrated similar blues arrangements that blues singer Bessie Smith recorded through complex harmonies of his banjo “disintegrating any distinction between rural primitivism and urban cool.”¹³⁹ This distinction, however, only demonstrates that race records tied southern Black artists to stereotypes of isolation, with record companies asking Black performers to embody minstrel stereotypes. Southern Black artists were limited to minstrel depictions of the blues, despite their fondness for much of the pop songs and old-time ballads they played earlier in their careers. Unlike southern white musicians, southern Black artists were told to play one style of music and pretend the rest did not exist.¹⁴⁰

An example of southern Black musicians struggling to make music they knew and heard as they worked within the limits placed on them by musical markets is Bill Livers. Livers was a Black fiddle player who would later become a country music legend in Kentucky, overcoming

¹³⁶ Ibid., 50.

¹³⁷ Miller, *Segregating Sound*, 220-1.

¹³⁸ Ibid., 223-5.

¹³⁹ Ibid., 226.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid., 227.

many of the obstacles of race because of his musical ability. Livers grew up in rural Kentucky and lived in poverty due to the racial codes that created horrible living environments for Black people.¹⁴¹ Many would leave due to the violence and poverty, but Livers' family stayed. Keenly aware of the limitations he faced in society, Livers used music to upend racial barriers, even if it was only momentarily. From an early age Livers commanded audiences with his musical talents and moved away from his home in the 1930s to find great success playing in bands. It is unclear if he was a sideshow, as he was a part of group known as the "idiots" in which he led a group of white "idiots," raising questions both of racial ambiguity and blatant racism.¹⁴² Regardless, his musical and comic ability could not be denied as he found success entertaining whites in central Kentucky for several decades. Livers understood the racial environment around him and sought not to change it, but rather live outside of it. While some thought these actions were noble, he was heavily criticized by the Black community for spending most of his time entertaining whites. No matter what Bill Livers did he could not escape the racial relations and white supremacy, as he died in Kentucky a poor tenant farmer and an old-time music legend. Buried in a segregated graveyard in 1988, Livers is a true embodiment of the progression of a music industry that racialized its subjects, creating barriers and limitations he could never escape, no matter his talent.¹⁴³ Livers was robbed of his artistic merits and potential despite recognition as a transitional figure in Kentucky music history. The same people who praised Livers for his talent also "entombed his Black body in an eternally segregated environment."¹⁴⁴

¹⁴¹ Jeffrey A. Keith, "Fiddling with Race Relations in Rural Kentucky," in *Hidden in the Mix: The African American Presence in Country Music*, ed. Diane Pecknold (Durham: Duke University Press, 2013), 120.

¹⁴² *Ibid.*, 124-5.

¹⁴³ *Ibid.*, 124-35.

¹⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 136.

Record companies maintained distinctions between who played what, giving white “hillbilly” artists more leniency to record mass-produced pop songs. These artists were not limited to racial definitions of their music like their Black counterparts. Allowing whites to record blues and interracial music in the South and limiting Black artists’ ability to record old-time music, provides further evidence of white supremacist musical beliefs.¹⁴⁵ Fox’s examination of this issue is even more graphic, noting the role black-face played in shaping current trends in country music today, as disenfranchised whites took to the stage to mirror their own uneasiness at the start of the globalized music industry.¹⁴⁶ White southern artists used this ability to perpetuate minstrelsy stereotypes in their blues recordings. With the perpetuation of copyrighted songs, music executives sought to buy up songs and line their pockets with the profits made from them, while also having control of who could sing what. Groups like The Mississippi Sheiks in the late 1920s could not release their version of Jimmy Rodger’s blue yodel, despite the long history of Black musicians incorporating yodeling into their music and performances prior to Rodger’s success.¹⁴⁷ Thus, the race and old-time categories developed imagery of southern white and Black artists as the specific stereotypes they were meant to represent. Despite white old-time artists having more freedom to record, the industry often “obscured the long southern embrace of American popular music, creating false impressions of Black singers and consumers.”¹⁴⁸ Omitting evidence of Black excellence in all forms of music, the music industry “masked the long history of southern musical integration across the color line,” establishing the

¹⁴⁵ Miller, *Segregating Sound*, 230-3.

¹⁴⁶ Fox, *Natural Acts*, 31.

¹⁴⁷ Miller, *Segregating Sound*, 237-9.

¹⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 239.

belief that Black and white southerners had different musical tastes and styles, “rather than their common histories, sounds, and relationships to American popular music.”¹⁴⁹

In sum, music and performance was used as a way to establish difference, make profit, and segregate based on race. While the goal of this project is not to provide a complete detailed history of musical encounters, by shedding light on these early pivotal untold stories, and providing further evidence of the racial musical shifts occurring in the early music industry, I hope to provide a starting point for change and solidarity in these stories. Examining country, hip hop and current bluegrass reveal the racist and class based assumptions of the music industry. What is not as clear is if anything can be made of it. Acknowledgement of these histories does not immediately assume that any recognition or change within an area will create change, but the message must be sent to push for a truly liberatory society. Appalachia’s forgotten Black songwriters and musicians must be heard; their voices need to echo through the hills. Questions of race and class abound moving forward, and finding a voice is the first step, which this history hopes to restore. More current trends of both bluegrass and country can provide further evidence that these echoes are needed today.

Country Music and Bluegrass 1940-Present: Implications of a Racist past

As the commercialization of music separated acts based on race, the wide-spread popularity of the radio ensured the entrenchment of genres and economic aspirations of the music industry. As Bill C. Malone understands, what is today known as “country” music appeared as early as the 1920s old-time genre which included “fiddlers, banjo players, string bands, balladeers, yodelers, gospel singers, and other “grassroots” performers who, for the first time, began making

¹⁴⁹ Ibid., 239.

phonograph recordings and radio broadcasts.”¹⁵⁰ Country music was an image of simplicity of a rural America. Originally labelled as old-time and “hillbilly” music in record catalogues earlier on, it was not until the 1940s that country music became the identifying label.¹⁵¹ Country music as we know it is grounded firmly in the false idea of authenticity. Country music, whether it was on minstrel stages or over the radio, “has been a commercial enterprise since its very inception” and has always been implicated in race or gender relations.¹⁵² The earliest country musicians were workers and farmers, who performed music as a hobby, with many influences and ideals resisting definitions. Early country musicians came from all over the South, including the Appalachian Mountains, with songs that provided accounts of rural life, religion, and folk culture.¹⁵³ The explosion in radio sales during the 1920s led to many white southern homes tuning into nightly radio broadcasts of recent country entertainment. “Hillbilly” music’s astounding popularity over the radio had conflicting images of enchantment to southern degeneracy and isolation.¹⁵⁴ The demand for this music led to music executives sweeping the South for talent, and with the discovery of the Carter Family and Jimmie Rodgers, the music industry executives had their stars. Both dominated radio airwaves in the early 1930s and 40s, with the contrasting style of Rodgers, who experimented with different styles, and the Carter Family, which represented a down home, church, and family atmosphere that many related to and provided comfort in their homes.¹⁵⁵

¹⁵⁰ Bill C. Malone, *Singing Cowboys and Musical Mountaineers: Southern Culture and the Roots of Country Music* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2003), 6.

¹⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 7.

¹⁵² Fox, *Natural Acts*, 4.

¹⁵³ Malone, *Singing Cowboys and Musical Mountaineer*, 70-1.

¹⁵⁴ Bill C. Malone and Tracey Laird, *Country Music USA: 50th Anniversary Edition*, (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2018), 39-47.

¹⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 76-9.

The emphasis The Carter Family placed on home and old-fashioned living is a tenet found in current country music, although it is more difficult today considering the technological innovations of television and the internet in the years that followed.¹⁵⁶ Jimmie Rodgers' stardom, however, provides an understanding of current country music's star-oriented approach. Rodgers, often referred to "as the father of country music," introduced new styles of music in the genre, often singing wide ranges of pop songs, and sold incredible numbers of records with some guessing he sold as high as twenty million.¹⁵⁷ The popularity of Rodgers' famous yodel, which has African roots, and his musical renditions and voice, had the strongest impact in the South during the Great Depression. Although Rodgers died in 1933, his influence in country music remained when Merle Haggard, another country music legend, produced a tribute to his songs in 1969.¹⁵⁸ The stage had been set for performers to make money singing old ballads and pop songs to southern audiences. By constructing myths of white musical authenticity, country music has always been connected to business and narrative control.¹⁵⁹

Similarly, bluegrass follows these tenets and fits in neatly with country music commercialism. Bill Monroe, the father of bluegrass, played with his band Bill Monroe and The Blue Grass Boys in 1939, with the older songs found in country music. Bluegrass, which during the fifties was noted as a unique form of country music, uses all acoustic instruments, consisting of the banjo, mandolin, guitar, fiddle, and bass.¹⁶⁰ The audience for these old-time traditional songs with higher pitch vocals were typically found in the Appalachian region. However, despite

¹⁵⁶ Ibid., 80-1.

¹⁵⁷ Ibid., 101-2.

¹⁵⁸ Ibid., 110.

¹⁵⁹ Diane Pecknold, *The Selling Sound: The Rise of the Country Music Industry* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2007), 1-4.

¹⁶⁰ Neil V. Rosenberg, *Bluegrass: A History* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1985), 3-7. L. Mayne Smith, "An Introduction to Bluegrass," *The Journal of American Folklore* 78, no. 309 (1965): 245-56.

the common generalizing of bluegrass as Appalachian, it is not. Bluegrass found a home in Appalachia for obvious reasons illustrated throughout the chapter. But bluegrass, like country music, is made up of many different inspirations, styles, unique identities, and most importantly the erasure of Black presence in these recordings.¹⁶¹ The music popular in bluegrass during the 40s and 50s and today features most commonly the longing for home, traditional tunes, family, and church gatherings. Through the music of Monroe, and the symbolism of the past, sprawling landscapes and nostalgia provide listeners with a sort of religious experience.¹⁶² But make no mistake, despite the seemingly local songs produced, bluegrass was developed by professional musicians who define and change their music according to popularity and commercial appeal.¹⁶³ Much like the explosion of country music in the post- World War II era, bluegrass and the prominence of the banjo began making waves throughout the nation when many young artists began copying the sounds of Monroe and his band.¹⁶⁴ Much of the music played by Monroe's band consisting of the legendary banjo player Earl Scruggs, and equally influential guitar player Lester Flatts, was primarily influenced by blackface minstrelsy, in a time when so many in the country were longing for the past.¹⁶⁵ This is not to say that Monroe himself was racist, but it is telling of the trajectory of a musical genre that is so frequently associated with Black cultural practices, but contain very little if any Black artists.

“Hillbilly” records were big business, and “at the conclusion of the war, at least sixty-five recording companies, fifteen of them on the West Coast, were releasing country records...radio

¹⁶¹ Rosenberg, *Bluegrass: A History*, 12-3.

¹⁶² Robert Cantwell, *Bluegrass Breakdown: The Making of the Old Southern Sound* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2003), 35-8.

¹⁶³ Smith, “An Introduction to Bluegrass,” 250.

¹⁶⁴ Malone and Laird, *Country Music USA*, 388.

¹⁶⁵ Cantwell, *Bluegrass Breakdown*, 48.

continued to be an indispensable means of exploiting hillbilly talent.”¹⁶⁶ But despite the selling power of country music, Billboard called the music backwards, old-folks music and gave it very little attention, disregarding most of the rural population.¹⁶⁷ It was precisely that the music spoke of the past that both bluegrass and country music were selling so well. New bands were beginning to form as both Flatt and Scruggs left the Bluegrass Boys to make their own sound as Lester Flatt, Earl Scruggs, and the Foggy Mountain Boys.¹⁶⁸ Bluegrass echoes many sounds and relates to so many people in the rural South and is what it is because of these relationships to other forms of music and people alike. Like jazz, bluegrass relies heavily on improvisation and melds preexistent parts to the content of “hillbilly” music. Bluegrass can best be understood to contain a variety of influences, which Monroe integrated with his use of acoustic instruments and the African practice of syncopation to convey messaging across different mediums.¹⁶⁹ Monroe and bluegrass musicians, heavily influenced by blues singers and Black cultures, brought the past into the present. The music exploded commercially, much like “hillbilly” and race music did years before, thanks to new technological innovations such as the radio, television, and later the music festival scene.¹⁷⁰ Heavily reliant on these technological innovations, artists knew they had to appeal to certain demographics to sell. Throughout the post war period, country artists relied heavily on religious music, considering many were uncertain and fearful of the present and future.¹⁷¹ Religion, boogie, and honky-tonk swing music had unbridled success throughout the 1950s, again capitalizing on rural traditions and Black-derived forms of entertainment.¹⁷²

¹⁶⁶ Malone and Laird, *Country Music USA*, 234.

¹⁶⁷ Rosenberg, *Bluegrass: A History*, 80.

¹⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 76-8.

¹⁶⁹ Cantwell, *Bluegrass Breakdown*, 64-71.

¹⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 80-8. Rosenberg, *Bluegrass: A History*, 204-27.

¹⁷¹ Malone and Laird, *Country Music USA*, 262-3.

¹⁷² *Ibid.*, 264-74.

For bluegrass musicians and acts to get on the radio they had to appeal to country music deejays, and these deejays were instrumental in the naming of bluegrass, but also the dissemination of it around the country.¹⁷³ Due to the subsequent changing of genres and popularity of rock and roll, country performers were changing their styles to get air play. Bluegrass musicians like Monroe were also speeding up their sounds while remaining true to old-time tunes, and bluegrass found itself between what record companies described as folk and country music.¹⁷⁴ Unlike country music, which found itself in a loss of identity through crossover with pop and rock and roll by the end of the 1950s, bluegrass carried a cult status in the genre of country as a reminder of the past in the present.¹⁷⁵ Bluegrass would chart on country lists throughout the 1960s and 70s, and in many instances dominated them.¹⁷⁶ It did not find mainstream success due to the mass popularity of rock and R&B, but many bluegrass artists found success at festivals and in country music in the 60s and 70s due to a folk music revival.¹⁷⁷ Country music during late 1950s moved away from the original musical expression of the rural South found in earlier records, to a more commercialized approach to compete with other genres such as rock and roll. In sum, Diane Pecknold describes that this “commercial success equated with respectability,” and the country music industry commanded money and with money came the “presentation of its own professionalism and business savvy.”¹⁷⁸ By implementing more rock and pop into the genre, country music executives were eager to sell records across the country any way they could to gain respect the genre never carried.

¹⁷³ Rosenberg, *Bluegrass: A History*, 95-10

¹⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 116-25.

¹⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 125-40.

¹⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 212-27.

¹⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 272-80, 340-3, 368.

¹⁷⁸ Pecknold, *The Selling Sound*, 94.

This shift in country music's approach is demonstrated by Charles L. Hughes in *Country Soul: Making Music and Making Race in the American South* through the incorporation of soul music in country songs. Hughes's work demonstrates the repeated pattern of commercializing Black success for white profit. The 1960s and 70s were a tense period and the color line Miller describes was clearly present, with country music as a white music that was firmly in line with right-wing politicians, anti-Civil Rights, and pro-war sentiments.¹⁷⁹ This messaging and music resonated with many middle-class white Americans across the country, the early 70s being a time when this messaging was most prominent.¹⁸⁰ Soul music was the opposite, and represented the musical tastes of Black protest during the Civil Rights movement into the early 1970s. During this time Black musicians were consistently objected to mistreatment from whites in southern studios, leading to the praising of "whites with the racial breakthrough and the blaming of African Americans for destroying integrated magic."¹⁸¹ Race relations were being defined by the making of music, as country and soul were commonly recognized as the distance between white and Black.¹⁸² The example of Charlie Pride presents these dynamics best as the 1970s signaled a time in country music where whites described themselves as victims, evident in Merle Haggard's song "I'm a White Boy."¹⁸³ With push back against Civil Rights and anti-war sentiments, the ascendance of white conservatism in country through a focus on color blind politics led to a boom in country sales. This was in stringent opposition to the Black Power movement happening alongside it. The massive success of Black artist Charley Pride provided country music and the Nashville industry proof of country's racial tolerance.¹⁸⁴ Country music

¹⁷⁹ Malone and Laird, *Country Music USA*, 375-8

¹⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 433.

¹⁸¹ Charles L. Hughes, *Country Soul: Making Music and Making Race in the American South*, *Country Soul* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2015), 5.

¹⁸² *Ibid.*, 6-7.

¹⁸³ *Ibid.*, 128.

¹⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 129-30.

never had much room for Black artists, even though the roots of the genre are based in black-face minstrelsy.

Pride, discovered by country star Red Sovine, was immediately hidden from the public and told to rid his music of Black influence. Pride's race was kept a secret until he received regular radio play in the mid-1960s. Pride demonstrated both racial progress and division between the supposed white and Black musical boundaries.¹⁸⁵ Pride was a polarizing figure for Blacks, who saw him as a sellout. Pride responded to questions about his race in typical color-blind fashion, not acknowledging the racial formations of the country music industry. In doing so, Pride's success in country music pushed back at the racial limits of country music, but also only extended so far due to his music's rejection of race assertions.¹⁸⁶ Clearly, soul and country music were deeply divided on issues of race, particularly through the songs produced by country music artists in the Nashville industry. This was most obvious in the military during the Vietnam war, where country music records provoked Black listeners with anti-anti-war sentiments.¹⁸⁷ Despite Pride's success in the industry, Black artists felt that they did not exist to Nashville and faced real limitations to the Nashville mainstream establishment.¹⁸⁸ Jerry "Swamp Dogg" Williams is a perfect illustration of the limitations Black artists felt in recording country music. Williams wrote songs that commented on ecological deterioration, excessive consumerism, and racism, which Nashville and country executives did not want to hear. To sell his music, he had to record music that did not sound too white, instead using soul and funk characteristics in his

¹⁸⁵ Ibid., 134.

¹⁸⁶ Ibid., 137.

¹⁸⁷ Ibid., 142.

¹⁸⁸ Ibid., 144-5.

music. Williams's song "She's all I Got" did win an award for best songwriter at a country music awards show, a show which Williams was never invited to.

Despite constant marginalization, Williams, and other Black artists, continued to make racially progressive music with country flair.¹⁸⁹ It was not Williams who saw success in country music through anti-racist country music, but instead a white man named Joe South. South, like Williams, protested racial inequality, violence, and other social issues with his mix of soul, country, gospel, and rock. These sounds do provide potential for progress, but the progress was only marginally accepted when a white artist crossed over to soul.¹⁹⁰ Hughes puts it best, "once again, white people managed to have black music without at least most of the Black people."¹⁹¹ Country music, as Pecknold indicates, uses its own commercial success to shape its meanings.¹⁹² By 1986, country music had established itself as the white working class music of the U.S. The 80s marked a transition period as young new faces were coming through the ranks, such as Reba McEntire, George Strait, Lee Ann Womack, and Garth Brooks, among others.

During this time country music had a preponderance of styles and a lot of experimentation with sounds, because the artists coming through grew up on both old-time, soul, pop, and rock and roll.¹⁹³ Garth Brooks took the industry to new heights with cross-over hits in pop and rock and roll. By 1996 he had sold over sixty million albums due to his style that spoke to country and rock audiences alike.¹⁹⁴ Vince Gill, along with Brooks, ushered in an era of good looking entertainers that combined the best of country and rock music. It is no surprise that with

¹⁸⁹ Ibid., 146-7. Charles L. Hughes, "You're My Soul Song: How Southern Soul Changed Country Music," in *Hidden in the Mix: The African American Presence in Country Music*, ed. Diane Pecknold (Durham: Duke University Press, 2013), 296-8.

¹⁹⁰ Hughes, *Country Soul*, 150-1.

¹⁹¹ Hughes, "You're My Soul Song," 302.

¹⁹² Pecknold, *The Selling Sound*, 238.

¹⁹³ Malone and Laird, *Country Music USA*, 495-500.

¹⁹⁴ Ibid., 502.

the invention of SoundScan, a data base that provided more accurate sales records from barcode scans, that thirty-seven percent of the U.S. population listened to country music, considering the number of cross-over artists in country music.¹⁹⁵ It was also due to development of music videos and the Country Music Television channel that helped catapult these sounds into living rooms across America. Because country music was highly commercial and relatable to white working class Americans, it was in essence adult pop music.¹⁹⁶ Women were also breaking through in rapid succession, with the commercial success of Faith Hill, Shania Twain, Sara Evans, and the Dixie chicks in the 1990s, which opened new avenues previously unheard of in the country music industry.¹⁹⁷ Country music still had an identity problem, with many asking what constitutes authentic country? The dynamics of this question linked closely with the early minstrel stage performances to define an authentic depiction of Black life. This search for authenticity and identity in recent years has led to the success of “bro country”, which celebrates drinking, girls, and parties without respect for the history of the genre.¹⁹⁸

The current debates in country revolving around the boundaries on whether something is or is not country music often involve Black artists. Recently Lil Nas X, a Black hip hop and country artist, released a country song, “Old Town Road,” which was immediately pulled from Billboard’s country list for not having enough country music elements in the song.¹⁹⁹ In contrast, Tim McGraw, and Nelly’s song “Over and Over” was allowed on all country music lists, raising questions of whether Black musicians are only allowed to cross-over into country with a white

¹⁹⁵ Ibid., 493.

¹⁹⁶ Ibid., 502-7.

¹⁹⁷ Ibid., 506-11.

¹⁹⁸ Ibid., 547.

¹⁹⁹ Mark Laver, “Perspective | Lil Nas X and the Continued Segregation of Country Music,” *Washington Post*, June 20, 2019, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/outlook/2019/06/20/lil-nas-x-continued-segregation-country-music/>. Kendall Trammell, “Country Rap Is Getting Bigger, and Lil Nas X Is Leading the Way,” *CNN*, July 21, 2019, <https://www.cnn.com/2019/07/20/entertainment/lil-nas-x-country-rap-trnd/index.html>.

established country musician? Despite this, country music remains a reliable source of entertainment for white America, with the likes of new staples Carrie Underwood, Brad Paisley, and Blake Shelton.²⁰⁰ The internet has proliferated the commercialization of country music, blurring industry lines and distinctions. But the distinction of what qualifies as country music is still up to the white Nashville-based industry. While there may be no clear center of country music, historically country music has enforced racial boundaries in its search for a white authenticity through the disavowal of Black artists and the impact they have had on the genre. Country is a mixture of white and Black musical cultures and heritages, but it was sold and commercialized as a mythical authentic white art form that mocked Blackness and continually evades its past grievances. There is no one remedy to combat this racially informed music, and my own love for country music is often at odds with my political beliefs. Current understandings of anti-racist messaging in country music still relies on the forgive and forget rhetoric, as found in Brad Paisley's song "Accidental Racist."²⁰¹ This song simply claims we must work together and forget the history that came before. Again, ignoring history only leads to more problems and an absence of actual reckoning and solidarity. What is needed in country music, Martinsville, Appalachia, and the U.S. broadly is an understanding of the complex history of race and its enforcement in American commercial music and institutions. By removing race, we lose that important history, we lose the ability for artists to explain themselves, we lose narratives, and we lose the liberatory potential of music. Music provides us with the ability to disrupt, challenge, and remember both the good and the bad of our society. The disease of systemic racism is woven into our personal, musical, and institutional histories. It takes an acknowledgement of that, as well a celebration and recognition of the many Black artists who can force us to consider the

²⁰⁰ Malone and Laird, *Country Music USA*, 557-60.

²⁰¹ Hughes, *Country Soul*, 189.

ways in which race and class in the U.S. impacts people in all areas of their lives.²⁰² New artists like Otis Taylor and Our Native Daughters provide a conversation that acknowledges racism and give a voice to the African banjo echoes in Appalachia.

Where do we go from here?: Recapturing the Banjo?

Country music has long been understood as an authentic version of white rural life, whether it was played on old-time or “hillbilly” records in the early twentieth century, mid 1960s, or on the minstrel stage impersonating Black culture. The lineage is clear; the business practice of country music was founded on mechanisms of racism and class that prevents Blacks from participating in music they helped create unless they hide their race. By first racializing Black people as criminal, ignorant, and needy, minstrelsy provided a way for white musicians to experiment with musical cultures unfamiliar to them and incorporate it within their acts for profit. Despite the hard work and efforts of Black performers like Will Marion Cook, Bessie Smith, Ray Charles, Jimmy “Swamp Dogg” Williams, and the countless others not mentioned, these traditional sounds rooted in African tradition were commercialized and segregated within an industry to ensure the continuation of systemic racism.

Recently, several artists who proudly tout the banjo have provided music that resists these barriers and reclaim the Black cultural practices that were never lost, only silenced. Otis Taylor’s album *Recapturing the Banjo* provides a crucial reflection on the Black presence in bluegrass, blues, jazz, and rock music.²⁰³ Taylor’s album uses the tune of old folk songs but lyrics that address racism and continual problems Black people face in the U.S. His track “Ten Million

²⁰² Ibid., 193.

²⁰³ Otis Taylor, *Recapturing the Banjo*, YouTube Music (Cleveland: Telarc, 2007).

Slaves” uses both electric guitar riffs, high pitched banjo chords, and raspy lyrics to describe the evils of slavery and racism. Throughout this album, Taylor eloquently incorporates the banjo into music that describes not only the past terrors of Black life, but also the melodies of forgotten histories and a hope for future. The final track of the album, “The Way it Goes,” uses only the banjo to tell a story of the racist attacks he endures. Despite this he continues to persevere and hope for better days because that is the way it goes. Taylor’s album does what it intends, recapturing the banjo, if only for fifty-five minutes, telling stories of Black struggle and hope. Taylor’s album is a pivotal piece of storytelling that brings listeners face to face with erased African cultural practices, troubles, and histories.

An apt complement to Taylor’s 2007 release is Rhiannon Giddens, Allison Russell, Leyla McCalla and Amythyst Kiah who all make up the group Our Native Daughters. The release of their album *Songs of Our Native Daughters* captures brilliantly the historical battles of racism, sexism, slavery, and identity in the U.S. with a variety of African-inspired musical sounds.²⁰⁴ Reflecting on slavery and racism, they too incorporate the banjo as a primary voice in telling stories of violence and pain. They link the banjo to its African heritage and provide accounts of its history, while also attacking the mechanisms of racism and celebrating Black women in this cultural practice. In an interview with Smithsonian Magazine, Giddens states, “to learn the history of the banjo is to recover the actual history of America.”²⁰⁵ Giddens presents her knowledge of historical oppression through her music to inform people and work towards remembrance and justice. She adds that “art is so important, because we can force these

²⁰⁴ Rhiannon Giddens et al., *Songs of Our Native Daughters*, YouTube Music (Washington, D.C: Smithsonian Folkways, 2019).

²⁰⁵ Charlie Weber, “Why These Four Banjo-Playing Women Resurrected the Songs of the Enslaved,” Smithsonian Magazine, April 10, 2019, <https://www.smithsonianmag.com/smithsonian-institution/why-these-four-banjo-playing-women-resurrected-songs-enslaved-180971926/>.

conversations,” she and the members of Our Native Daughters play the banjo to start these important conversations that have been deleted from American history.²⁰⁶ Black history is American history, and we can no longer censor these stories of Black resistance and culture. The album, through a discussion of slavery, racism, and emancipation, addresses how Black people have always faced problems of racism post-slavery in all walks of life. Using the banjo as the primary instrument, and consisting of only female vocals, Giddens, Kiah, McCalla, and Russell present forgotten histories and confront them. The African banjo lives on in the music of Black men and women everywhere, and these songs demonstrate the urgency of problems we face today. Confronting issues of racism, sexism, and slavery through the banjo and Black cultural traditions, Our Native Daughters provides the African banjo echoes in Appalachia that must be reckoned with.

The many Black musicians that played the banjo during slavery need acknowledgment to combat the long history of Black racial oppression. Music is a gateway for uncovering these hidden pasts that continue to separate people based on race and class. The rich history of musical interplay between whites and Blacks can become a place of resistance rather than a point of departure. Listening and speaking out against the institutions of racism is found in the early “sorrow songs” described by Du Bois and these tenets are continued by artists like Our Native Daughters and Otis Taylor.²⁰⁷ The list of musicians that speak out against oppression and aim to liberate Black people can also be found in the catalogs of “race” music. The musical genres of blues, jazz, and later funk, soul, r&b, and hip hop create new musical outlets after the banjo to resist white supremacy and provide hope for equality and freedom. These African banjo echoes

²⁰⁶ Ibid.

²⁰⁷ W.E.B. Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk* by W. E. B. Du Bois: With a Critical Introduction by Patricia H. Hinchey (1903; Bloomfield: Myers Education Press, 2018), XIV. Of the Sorrow Songs.

are still audible in Appalachia, and they provide stories and express concerns that must be heard and addressed in Martinsville, Appalachia, and the U.S. to progress.²⁰⁸

²⁰⁸ Conway, *African Banjo Echoes*, 290-5.

Chapter 3: Hip hop resolutions in Country Music Pasts

“Only God can judge me (is that right)”- Tupac Shakur

Introduction

Hip hop is, in many ways, the voice of a generation growing up in urban areas, that are battered by police violence and have underfunded social programs.¹ Describing the quotidian daily life of poverty, attrition, survival, and resistance of this life by Black artists, hip hop is as Tricia Rose describes it in her work, *Black Noise: Rap Music and Black Culture in Contemporary America*, “black noise.” It is the ability of hip hop to speak across barriers and oppression via a microphone that connects it to the banjo, country, blues, jazz, and much of the music used in the Civil Rights Movement. The connection between the banjo and hip hop has shaped many lives in southern rural communities, even my own. Asking the question, how did the segregated divisions in the music industry lead to hip hop culture and “black noise?” Using numerous examples and historical accounts, this chapter addresses this question by elaborating on hip hop’s connection to the early understanding of race music, jazz, blues, and even country music. This leads to a discussion on why these histories matter and must be reckoned with to create new worlds and possibly a cross-racial solidarity movement, with music as its tool.

To answer this question, this chapter is split into three sections analyzing different aspects of the genres of music. The first section provides further understandings of the racial color line in the development of the music industry. An analysis of this history provides new questions and insights on the importance of musical development and the dynamics of race and

¹ Tricia Rose, *Black Noise: Rap Music and Black Culture in Contemporary America* (Wesleyan University Press, 1994).

class. An examination of the early blues and jazz genres demonstrate how Blacks were continually left out of the music they created, often losing jobs and opportunities to less talented white musicians. The blues, however, supplied a breakthrough for many Black musicians, especially women, who used their talent and musical prowess to dictate market forces any way they could. This solidifies music as an ever-evolving form of production with endless possibilities and distinct histories. Ray Charles, James Brown, Billie Holiday, and Langston Hughes, among others, performed and broke through racial lines providing inroads for Black musical vernaculars in the Civil Rights Movement, while also influencing music in Appalachia.

The second section analyzes hip hop's historical trajectory and its importance and drawbacks with other genres of music. Hip hop, and importantly rap music, provides links to past African and Anglo-Saxon cultural roots through rhyme, lyricism, and narrative, continuing the stories of those that came before them. Becoming a worldwide phenomenon, however, hip hop has serious drawbacks, as the continuation of racial lines and codes created centuries before are still present in the commercialization of hip hop culture broadly. The mass commercialization and glorification of Black racial stereotypes reinforces white neoliberal interests, while also hampering the ability of hip hop and rap to connect audiences with real issues in Black communities. Despite this, hip hop's broad reach limns musical resistance against white supremacy by providing social commentary and personal narrative that cleverly inverts racial stereotypes and critiques the institutions of racial oppression and injustice in the U.S. Hip hop and rap also operate similarly to religious practices, or rather as a religion, for Black youth, as it provides a place of expression, awareness, resistance, and hope. Hip hop operates like a musical archive that critiques and addresses the many historical problems Black communities face.

I conclude with an examination on what reckoning with these racial musical developments means for hip hop and bluegrass in Appalachia. Addressing similar interests of music and protest, this section links Appalachian communities with those outside of the region. Examining the work of activist organizations and artists in Appalachia that use hip hop to educate, critique, and express themselves against structural inequalities, provides links and bridges to other communities that also use rap and hip hop to tell their stories. Examining the music of Gangstagrass, the connections between musical genres, racial injustice, and liberation is relayed by sharp critiques of racial oppression and resistance to it by Black people. The banjo, once again, provides the tune that Black voices use to carry across genres and mountains, despite the strict segregation that has kept white and Black histories separate in Appalachia. The role and importance of this in relation to my own hometown Martinsville, Virginia, is pivotal for my project and cross-racial solidarity. Can these histories provide impetus for change in a region clouded with historically racist social, economic, and political problems? Or is it a process of change that music is guiding? Do the varied musical expressions found throughout allow for a reckoning of a long and violent history that is progressing towards an antiracist society? In sum, imagining new possibilities may be all that can be done for now, but the hope of a more just and unified society persists in these musical echoes.

Race music to the Civil Rights: Resistance Required

Moving directly from banjo and old time tunes, labelled “hillbilly” music, many African American musicians began to create new sounds throughout the early twentieth century. Dena Epstein’s work *Sinful Tunes and Spirituals*, marvelously tracks the development of many of the

songs heard on minstrel stages during the early years of slavery.² The stereotypes that were created from black-face minstrelsy continued into the early years of Black musical development in Tin Pan Alley music and the blues. Scholarship generally homogenized much of the music in cultural terms, often attempting to explain these shifts via folklore. This was the primary difference between whites and Blacks in music for scholars. As Charles Keil describes, “white writers...tend to be folklorizing, documenting, defining, and social scientific: let’s pin it down.”³ Much interest in scholarship has been placed on determining what is justified as folk music, and most of the music that came from African American artists has been primarily viewed as a liberatory music. Which in some respects may be true, but the homogenization of a musical culture as a resistance to another ignores entirely the complexities, cultural memory, and everyday occurrences present in African American culture. Blackness troubles the disciplinary boundaries used to define genres and scholars, and they have dealt with it by attempting to homogenize it.⁴ The main questions I ask throughout this section are: how was the music separated? Who profited, and what was the response? To answer these questions, I examine the multiple genres of blues, jazz, gospel, soul, and later hip hop as a response to both white supremacy and the suppression of Black artistic expression in the public sphere. There is an ethnographic refusal among scholars to acknowledge the many power struggles involved, which creates narratives of racial segregation and otherness. Accordingly, by refusing to acknowledge any population their own cultural practices from systems of their own construction and meanings breeds more contempt, stereotypes, and misinformation, not only about the musical process but

² Dena J. Epstein, *Sinful Tunes and Spirituals: Black Folk Music to The Civil War* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1977).

³ Charles Keil quoted in Guthrie P. Ramsey, *Race Music: Black Cultures from Bebop to Hip-Hop* (Irvine: University of California Press, 2003), 159.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 19.

also the process of racial identity.⁵ Integrally, Black musical narratives are ignored in favor of the supposed “authentic” narratives of Black life sung by whites that record companies would market to the country and world. In sum, as previous chapters illustrate, Blackness is ignored, critiqued, and discounted, while it also operates as a tool that empowers Black artists to talk back against systemic racist institutions.

Continually, Black narratives are discounted in favor of capital promotion. Pre-Civil Rights music was, as were people, segregated, and created to exclude Blacks from the record business they had a major role in creating. This changed in some ways with the Black blues singer Mamie Smith, who was the first Black person to record their vocals on a blues record. In 1920, Smith recorded the song “Crazy Blues”, and because of similar circumstances of race in the industry, Okeh records had originally assigned a popular white singer Sophie Tucker to record. Okeh records, like most record companies in the 1920s, recorded both race and old-time or “hillbilly” music in different catalogs. Due to having a massive catalog of recorded music through fieldtrips to mostly southern music hotbeds like Atlanta, Georgia, and their acquisition of top talent, they were a very popular label.⁶ Okeh is one of the few remaining record companies from this era that still records jazz music under Sony Music Entertainment, after being acquired by Columbia records in 1927. Okeh embraced and enforced the color line in the music industry, placing whites above Blacks, despite the music being largely written Black composers. When Sophie Turner did not show to record the song, Perry Bradford, the manager of Smith, insisted that a Black singer could sing “black music” better than whites could.⁷ Once

⁵ Ibid., 24-5.

⁶ Tony Russell and Bob Pinson, *Country Music Records: A Discography, 1921-1942* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), 21-2.

⁷ Karl Hagstrom Miller, *Segregating Sound: Inventing Folk and Pop Music in the Age of Jim Crow* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010). 189-91.

recorded, Smith's record flew off the shelves having sold 75,000 copies of the record in Harlem in only a few weeks for a dollar a piece.⁸ Even more remarkable was that the original purveyors of blues music, at least those recorded, were Black women. As noted in previous chapters, women, especially Black women, are underrepresented and their experiences are as Patricia Hill Collins describes "subjugated knowledges."⁹

The histories and stories of Black women are some of the most historically oppressed, but women continue to develop new ways to evaluate their experience and transpose traditional scholarship.¹⁰ Smith did just this and allowed for Blacks to hear their own voice in recorded music for the first time. The use of Black caricatures and racial stereotypes were still used to sell records to whites, but these recordings ended most black-face minstrel routines as Black singers were considered more authentic portrayals of the blues. To categorize this, Folklore became the new paradigm of judging music, and with this came similar, less upfront, racial, and ethnic stereotypes portrayed in minstrelsy. Folklore culminated in, as Miller states "the growing association between racial music and racial bodies and the distinction between mass produced music and southern culture."¹¹ Many of the contradictions and misconceptions that ethnomusicologists hold are due to folklore scholarship censoring origins of songs, or rarely discussing the diversity of artists it categorized ethnically. This would beget years of racial capital, claiming blues as authentic Black folk song and then profiting from it. Early scholarship developed a denial of white oppression, the inability to grapple with power dynamics and race,

⁸ Ibid., 192; Angela Y. Davis, *Blues Legacies and Black Feminism: Gertrude Ma Rainey, Bessie Smith, and Billie Holiday* (New York: Vintage Books, 1999), 152-3.

⁹ Patricia Hill Collins, *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment* (New York: Routledge, 2008 (1990)), 10, 230-5.

¹⁰ Ibid. 10-1.

¹¹ Miller, *Segregating Sound: Inventing Folk and Pop Music in the Age of Jim Crow*, 243.

and an insistence that Black people sang certain songs because that is all they could do. Folklore scholarship “shaped the sound and meaning of black music in the age of Jim Crow.”¹²

It is also worth briefly reemphasizing these similar patterns in the development of country music and bluegrass discussed in chapter two. The development of sound in country music is indeed indebted to years of minstrel, blues music, and racial oppression. Pamela Fox in her work *Natural Acts: Gender, Race, and Rusticity in Country Music*, echoes the scholarship of Bill Malone in her elaboration of the rigid masculinity and racism present in country music. Around the 1920s until the 1940s, minstrelsy and blackface occupied much of the country music scene, as authentic depictions of southern life, “honky tonk” country music was beginning to take off alongside the blues.¹³ Folklorists were concerned with authenticity, and record companies were concerned over sales, of which blues and country music provided both. Kip Lornell illustrates in his work *Virginia’s Blues, Country, & Gospel Records 1902-1943*, the music industry’s experimentation with racial imagery in advertisements, in regard to “hillbilly” and race records in the 1920s, to sell more records. The record industry did not know how to sell records and it gained insight from musicians who travelled to record and sell records themselves. Virginia alone brought about some of the most well-known country musicians such as the Carter family, particularly June Carter, who would later be June Carter Cash.¹⁴

The Appalachian region was full of talented musicians, but most were ignored for more accessible musicians not in obscure parts of Virginia.¹⁵ Many local artists and players did not or

¹² Ibid., 265.

¹³ Pamela Fox, *Natural Acts: Gender, Race, and Rusticity in Country Music* (University of Michigan Press, 2009). 42-65.

¹⁴ Kip Lornell, *Virginia’s Blues, Country, and Gospel Records, 1902-1943: An Annotated Discography* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1989), 9-11.

¹⁵ Ibid., 4-9.

could not record, because there were only a few major record companies in existence before 1943 and small regional independent studios were very rare and lacked the ability to pay performers anything. Thus, record companies, both big and small, were not looking to document the history of a region, but to sell it. Black artists in Virginia did not sell well, with exception of the Norfolk Jubilee Quartet and the many all-Black old-time string bands and were often left out of the industry.¹⁶ In fact, most Black artists within this discography are quartets, such as the Dinwiddie Colored Quartet, Golden Gate Quartet, and the Excelsior Quartet, just to name a few. Of great interest is the relatively short careers many of these artists had. Take for example the case of the Excelsior Quartet, they only recorded for a period of twelve years, producing only a limited number of tracks.¹⁷ This is likely because recording music was expensive and often the artist would owe the record company if they decided to take royalties for their song. In the case of Clarence Greene, he recorded two songs in 1930 and was advanced \$19.22 in royalties for the playing of the songs, but the songs only made thirty-four cents in royalties, meaning he owed the company \$18.88.¹⁸ The music industry was not lucrative for most, and this is a primary reason very little scholarly information on artists from Appalachia, especially Black Appalachian artists, exists. Musical careers were not common in the mountains, despite the rich musical traditions and players that existed there, such as Charlie Poole whose lasting impact can be seen in most music today. It was Poole's success in the music industry in the late 1920s early 1930s that encouraged other bands in the region to record.¹⁹ The business emphasized copyrights and censored much of the political messaging in the old-time and hillbilly genres. Race, as noted,

¹⁶ Ibid., 10-3. Tim Brooks, *Lost Sounds: Blacks and the Birth of the Recording Industry, 1890-1919* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2010).

¹⁷ Lornell, *Virginia's Blues, Country*, 62-3.

¹⁸ Ibid., 13-4.

¹⁹ Kinney Rorrer, "The North Carolina Rambler: Charlie Poole," *Appalachian Journal* 42, no. 3/4 (2015), 257-8.

heavily factored into the decisions of who could record, as much of the connection between the sounds heard in modern jazz and blues in race records obscured its Black cultural influence.²⁰ By establishing both blues and jazz as Black music during the 1920s, record companies dubbed jazz as a modern music, severing “the link between black music and popular music.”²¹

Jazz music, however, can be understood as an ‘analogue to democracy,’ emphasizing the ways Black musicians have historically struggled to have their voice heard. Under the constraints of the music industry, much of the history of jazz is marred with the dispersion of Blacks across the U.S. and racist white commercial interests. Jazz is a term many musicians who played the genre, associate with racism, poor working conditions, abuse, and exploitation.²² Jazz, born around 1880, was as Max Roach understood, “the culture of African people who have been dispersed throughout North America.”²³ Jazz is an offshoot of blues music, and much of the music that came from W.C. Handy, known as the “Father of the Blues,” provides direct links to the establishment of the blues as Black music.²⁴ Handy knew that the success of the music he composed and based on his experiences on plantations as a Black man in the South, “obscured its roots in southern black culture and among African Americans in general.”²⁵ By commercializing his messages, much of the impact he placed in his music would be lost to profit and white interest. Jazz, like the blues, faced similar problems, as scholars, critics, and the music industry writ large, categorized these songs and compositions as a form of folk music. Like “hillbilly” tracks, folklorists wanted to place their own meaning on blues and jazz tracks. This allowed for a

²⁰ Miller, *Segregating Sound*, 234-5.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 235.

²² Gerald Horne, *Jazz and Justice: Racism and the Political Economy of the Music* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 2019), 8-9.

²³ *Ibid.*, 9-10.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 11. Miller, *Segregating Sound*, 254-5.

²⁵ Miller, *Segregating Sound*, 255.

greater enforcement of the color line, as folklorists would identify these songs as authentic Black music. This implied that the process of segregation was an important tool for white folklorists to find “‘authentic’ race music forged by racial and commercial isolation.”²⁶ A prominent scholar during this time, Dorothy Scarborough, wrote a study on supposed isolated cultures, completely ignoring the inter-cultural exchange of whites, Native Americans, and Blacks. Instead, she promoted these depictions as the “interracial harmony of the slave era.” Scarborough, and many folklorists, emphasized racial character through a white racist lens that celebrated aspects of “Black creativity while ignoring the effects of white oppression.”²⁷ Ignoring historical oppression and musical roots was the consequence of many folklorist’s research goals of authenticity during the early music industry. They were more concerned with establishing racial categories, difference, and enforcing stereotypical assertions of those they researched, than accurately addressing the musical messaging present in the songs.

Jazz, like many Black art forms, including the banjo, was censored, attacked, and misunderstood. This is likely because jazz was developed in North America primarily by Black musicians “who had been pilloried because of their earlier slave status and adamant refusal to accept supinely a slaveholders’ republic.”²⁸ Anti-jazz movements were prominent, which ironically led to the improvisation synonymous with the genre today. Jazz musicians would often play with their wrong hand, play games while practicing, and experiment with instruments to distinguish themselves from other musicians and as a refusal to be classified. By creating a realm of hostility, jazz musicians like the Black minstrel performers and banjo griots before them, were establishing their own forms of musical expression due to the resistance towards and exploitation

²⁶ Ibid., 257.

²⁷ Ibid., 259.

²⁸ Horne, *Jazz and Justice*, 13.

of the genre.²⁹ Hate and fear of Black men in the U.S. shaped much of the music we hear today and led to enhanced bigotry and violence against Black composers. For example, in 1905, the Ku Klux Klan planned to tar and feather Black jazz musician Leo “Snub” Mosley and his band simply because they were playing for white people.³⁰ The many examples of brutality, horror, and intimidation that exist against Black musicians throughout the twentieth century exceeds the focus of this project. They do, however, indicate the paths Black musicians took to form their own recording companies free from this prejudice. Upon doing so, they received threats from mobsters and Italian Americans who began exerting themselves in the music industry to profit from jazz. Nick LaRocca, a trumpeter from New Orleans, and of Italian ancestry, argued throughout the 1920s and 1930s that jazz, or as he called it “Dixieland,” was a white form of music. In 1958, he continually proclaimed that Black musicians had no hand in the creation of Jazz.³¹ LaRocca, and many like him, re-enforced white supremacy to combat and discredit all Black expression and success.

LaRocca’s comments are clearly false, as jazz from its inception in New Orleans and Memphis in the early 1900s was developed by Black artists as a form of expression, which placed targets on the musician’s backs. A successful Black man was a threat to white commercial interests. This encouraged many Black artists to carry weapons and perform in speak-easies during the era of prohibition. Jim Crow laws also forced many of the great jazz musicians out of the South to find better treatment and pay in northern U.S. urban areas like New York City.³² Among those that fled was Danny Barker, whose arrival in New York did not fill him with hope, only more of the same racial oppression. He witnessed many Black artists struggling to make a

²⁹ Ibid., 13.

³⁰ Ibid., 15.

³¹ Ibid., 19-20.

³² Ibid., 52-8.

living during the Depression, turning to alcohol, drugs, and “dying of grief.”³³ Once North and in cities outside of the South, like Kansas City, Black musicians who dreamed of better opportunities were met with poor housing and similar harsh Jim Crow laws that banned Black people from public water fountains, theaters, and anywhere else whites were located.³⁴ Kansas City, once thought of as a haven for Black musicians, only worsened many of the problems they faced in the South. Once there, Black musicians faced the wrath of white supremacy via Tom Pendergast, a politician, and the mob boss Johnny Lazia. These two threatened, inflicted violence, and bombed Blacks who sought to flee the ghettos they were assigned to.³⁵ The same problems experienced in Kansas City were widespread throughout the country, as mobsters controlled much of the jazz business that existed in varying nightclubs to profit off these early Black jazz musicians. Herman Lubinsky, perhaps the most hated of music peddlers and thieves, is said to have stolen many of the songs written by Black musicians, and he even hooked artists on drugs to continue a lucrative business of racism and theft.³⁶ It leaves little to imagine why, as World War II approached, many Black jazz musicians fled the to go North, and upon finding similar conditions there, to Europe to play. Their stories, however, are largely ignored and discounted like so many other Black artists and citizens who suffer from systemic racial injustice. Folklorists and historians were too focused on authenticity and upholding white supremacist narratives to care about the problems those they studied faced.

With folklorists’ attention toward inscribing scholarly depictions of what classified as authentic Black music, Alan Lomax and Dorothy Scarborough continued to perpetuate beliefs that the music played was not a result of white oppression. The continual mistreatment of Black

³³ Ibid., 52-69.

³⁴ Ibid., 70-2.

³⁵ Ibid., 73-5.

³⁶ Ibid., 80-3.

artists and prisoners they met with did little to sway them because of their own bias in shaping what they understood as music free of racist treatment, violence, and terror. Like the Black jazz artists and Black old-time artists, no one cared about their mistreatment, only the profit that could be made. It was not segregation alone that produced this imagined Black culture, it was that “racial contact and white oppression infused and shaped the sound and meaning of Black music in the age of Jim Crow.”³⁷ The musical collection of these scholars are prime examples of racial oppression, mirroring the thieving music executives that exploited Black musical labor for profit or fame. The white sociologist, Howard Odum, was approached by various Black musicians who demanded to be paid for their time singing various secular songs. Odum reasoned that these men did not write the songs and only tended to deceive him to pay for songs that were not theirs.³⁸ Similarly, in 1942, Black blues musician, Son House, was upset with Lomax who recorded his music for hours for the Library of Congress and only received a Coke. Lomax and commercial scouts were making money and a career off Black singers. The Black musician, Willie Blackwell, saw no difference in Lomax and music industry executives who did the same.³⁹ Jazz, and early so-called folk songs, reaped huge rewards for music executives and folklorists who recorded them. But the Black musicians who performed these songs were often exploited, and received only debilitating poverty, hunger, and deception for their work.

Despite the many problems Black musicians faced in the music industry, Guthrie Ramsey’s work *Race Music: Black Cultures from Bebop to Hip-Hop*, provides a critical understanding for why blues, rock and roll, and later hip hop, provided platforms on which Blacks could, and did perform, engage, and resist these misrepresentations, albeit under heavy

³⁷ Miller, *Segregating Sound*, 265.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 266.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 266-7.

scrutiny. Using the Black Liberation thinker Amiri Baraka's (formerly Leroi Jones) understanding of what Blackness is and how it is always a "changing same", music is a place where identities are constantly changing, defined, and re-defined.⁴⁰ This is because "music works not as a residual artifact of ethnic identity, but as an important part of the materiality of ethnicity...not limited to ethnicity: it also involves how we experience our class status, our age, gender, sense of location and place, our daily activities, our rituals, rites of passage, and so on."⁴¹ Music is important within the evolution of Black life in America, because as noted via the banjo, new styles develop to beget old ones, not to simply re-envision life, but to continually represent the here and now. Memory and history are integral to this process, as what is recorded is completely different from the memory it may leave behind, creating new histories and stories to be told. Memory is the personal aspect of historical recollection, a thread that is created and interwoven in each musical encounter. It is within the exploration of memory and historical accounts that this project connects these shattered memories and ruptured histories to return them to the American conscious, and to reckon with them. Ramsey's historical arc of race music spanning from the 1940s-1990s anchors three distinct moments (Afro-Modernism, Black Consciousness, and Post-Industrialism), which add to twenty-first century Black musical understandings.⁴²

The first of which Afro-modernism, existed in the period roughly associated with the 1940s to 1960s when blues was beginning to take hold of the American commercial market. The genesis of popular Black blues music singers such as Mamie Smith, Bessie Smith, "Ma" Rainey,

⁴⁰ Guthrie P. Ramsey, *Race Music: Black Cultures from Bebop to Hip-Hop* (Irvine: University of California Press, 2003), 36. Leroi Jones, "The Changing Same (R&B and New Black Music)," in *Black Music* (New York, Da Capo Press, 1998), 180–211.

⁴¹ Ramsey, *Race Music*, 37.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 27-32.

and Billie Holiday, provided listeners with an insider's view of Black women's political and social worlds. A foreshadowing of events to come, but also a memory of social protest against the evils of racism. Angela Davis's work *Blues Legacies and Black Feminism*, frames this discussion with an examination of these blues voice powerhouses. Much like Ramsey, Davis provides a guided description of how their music explicitly changed stereotypes and challenged traditional views of women.⁴³ Harkening back to Collins, this is one of the first instances in recorded music when Black women redefined and attacked the horrid conditions and terms they were living under. Scholars and critics questioned the very ability for written music to impact social justice, forgetting the voices from where the music came from. In other words, Bessie Smith's numerous songs that examined alcoholism, racism, economic injustice, "and the seemingly insurmountable impoverishment of the black community," was not considered social protest because it did not connect with white folks.⁴⁴ Throughout Davis's work she demonstrates resistance of this through songs such as "Poor Man's Blues," which post-World War I gave a portrait of class and race relations. This record provides an illuminating depiction of how the rich white classes are unable to see or understand the economic and racial injustices they created.⁴⁵ The music written by these Black men and women critiqued and illuminated the racist patterns that exist in the U.S.⁴⁶ Similarly, Billie Holiday's song "Strange Fruit," recorded in 1939, operates as a protest of the lynching of Black men across the South. The lyrics, "Black bodies swinging in the southern breeze...here is a fruit for the crows to pluck...here is a strange and bitter cry," provides listeners with a visceral image of Black murder at the hands of lynch

⁴³ Angela Y. Davis, *Blues Legacies and Black Feminism: Gertrude Ma Rainey, Bessie Smith, and Billie Holiday* (New York: Vintage Books, 1999), 40-1.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 92-3.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 97.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 113.

mobs.⁴⁷ Songs such as these were a pre-cursor to the Civil Rights Movement push to free Blacks from this horror. An institution like the Civil Rights Movement was needed, but these songs gave further understandings of the conditions for Black people and the imminent death they face. It is worth noting, that without such songs and consciousness of the problems they incite, “activist stances are inconceivable.”⁴⁸

The blues are emblematic of shifts in African American culture. Songs such as, “It’s just the Blues,” released in the 1940s, demonstrates the shift from black-face minstrel notions of Black degradation to one of Black empowerment. Consequently, these songs provided African Americans an affirmation of culture and humanity despite the systemic racial codes currently in place.⁴⁹ Ramsey’s examples of Dinah Washington, Louis Jordan, and Cootie Williams provide a blues modality, and the influence of this would span the coming decades. Although these artist’s struggles provide insight into the racialized system they attempted to leap over, they also acknowledge the role they had in musical practice. Washington struggled with gendered roles and her appearance, so much so that she died of an accidental overdose of diet pills. Despite this, her musical talents commanded attention and paved the way for singers like Ella Fitzgerald and current artists Lil Kim, Niki Minaj, and Lizzo among many other Black female artists.⁵⁰ Similarly, Louis Jordan made lasting impacts and was widely popular during the 1940s. Jordan learned how to play music from minstrel shows he attended and participated in during his childhood, and his performances as an adult was heavily influenced by these shows. With

⁴⁷ Billie Holiday, *Strange Fruit*, YouTube Music (Commodore, 1939).

⁴⁸ Davis, *Blues Legacies and Black Feminism*, 119.

⁴⁹ Ramsey, *Race Music*, 50-1.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 57-61.

overemphasized expressions, gestures, and comical phrasing of words all demonstrate his popularity and the hesitancy for many African Americans to accept him.⁵¹

This dual nature of Black representation in the white hegemonic music industry operates as both a promotion of Black culture and narrative, but also unwittingly produces potentially harmful effects of a stereotypical image of Black culture. Of no fault to Black musicians, as noted throughout, most white scholars and listeners created their own understandings of Black life that made them comfortable with their own position in society. These narratives, generated by white critiques, were often what was dispersed and widely accepted in the country. However, the visibility of Black performers like Louis Jordan made huge strides for representation of artists in the African American community.⁵² Lastly, Cootie Williams, a gifted composer and musician, experimented with the various sounds he experienced throughout his life. He played popular swing band music gaining notoriety and earning money and fame where he could, and often crossing over genres, straddling between jazz and blues. As a bandleader, Williams drew on numerous influences and combined jazz and swing tradition with emerging styles such as rhythm and blues. Williams understood he had to play familiar music to remain successful, but he also stayed true to African concepts in music through experimentation and musical craftsmanship.⁵³ In all, these artists demonstrated a changing of “race” categories in the 1940s, which began to fade away as more and more artists were crossing over musical categories, fashioning the stage for the next generation of African American performers such as James

⁵¹ Ibid., 62-4.

⁵² Ibid., 62-7.

⁵³ Ibid., 71-3.

Brown, Chuck Berry, and Ray Charles.⁵⁴ Further epitomizing Baraka's indication of the "changing same."

With the development of 45 rpm records in 1949, television, and transistor radios, jazz, blues, and rock and roll were beginning to fuel a youth culture.⁵⁵ This did not mean that Black musicians had made huge strides economically, socially, or political. In fact, in 1940s Los Angeles, due to a mass influx of Black musicians from southern regions of the U.S., police were cracking down on Black neighborhoods due to the police force's inability to solve crimes. By raiding Black businesses, L.A cops were essentially ridding of any Black business opportunity that existed in the area because they had correlated jazz with an increase in criminal activity.⁵⁶ These racist understandings were also heavily present on the radio, when in 1949, a disc jockey in Detroit would be fired for playing a "black record" on a white radio station.⁵⁷ The race record category may have faded away, but the racial lines enforced by it were as strong as ever. Jim Crow policy was still exerting itself, despite the pressure from Black artists and the outside world's anti-fascist campaigns stemming from the horrors of Nazi Germany in World War II. In 1949, Bob Weinstock formed Prestige Records and proceeded to take advantage of numerous Black artists who were desperate for money. Weinstock signed them to exploitative record deals that forced them to record sizable performances in exchange for small advances that eradicated any future royalties.⁵⁸ Knowing that these musicians were desperate, music executives like Weinstock could continue to exploit Black musicians and gain massive amounts of profit. Often forcing artists to pay for the recording sessions that the record companies would then own and

⁵⁴ Ibid., 74-5.

⁵⁵ Horne, *Jazz and Justice*, 121.

⁵⁶ Ibid., 133.

⁵⁷ Ibid., 133-4.

⁵⁸ Ibid., 135-7

make millions from. Along with this, Black artists were continually threatened with murder by gangsters, underpaid, and when they were paid they were often given drugs as payment leading to massive problems of addiction and health insecurity.⁵⁹

Migration North was made even more difficult by music unions who were squeezing musicians to stay in the Jim Crow South. By the 1940s and 1950s, many of the Black publishing houses were gone, leaving even less opportunity for Black musicians to record and make a living from music.⁶⁰ By 1950, however, Black musicians were beginning to exert themselves against the mob-oriented music business, despite the dangers associated with it. A propulsion of anti-Jim Crow movements were taking place around the country, one of which was led by John Dolphin, a light-skinned Black man in Los Angeles. Dolphin led a march of Black people against the police in the area who patrolled a largely Black community with thirty-two officers per square mile.⁶¹ Mass exploitation and oppressive treatment led to Black musicians protesting racial injustice and sought opportunity elsewhere. In the 1950s, they began to see the slow retreat of state-sponsored Jim Crow. The exhausted artists sought change, and soon the U.S. would realize that it must change its outwardly racist policies to be considered a haven for human rights.⁶²

While underacknowledged, blues and improvisational music such as jazz, had a notable impact in Appalachia, but probably not in the same way as in other parts of the country. Miller theorizes that this music was not as widely heard in Appalachia, or rather that scholars believed that southerners had rejected such music. This shapes the narrative that historians were set on creating difference in music, and clear color lines were being drawn. It also speaks to the fact

⁵⁹ Ibid., 137-42.

⁶⁰ Ibid., 144-8.

⁶¹ Ibid., 154-5.

⁶² Ibid., 174-9.

that little if any of these accounts of Black exploitation were present in Appalachia. Tin Pan Alley, Broadway, jazz and minstrelsy, however, did provide avenues to new music styles with artists around the South, including Appalachia, where artists were always engaging with forms of popular music.⁶³ This point is made more apparent in William Lightfoot's work, "The Three Doc(k)s: White Blues in Appalachia," analysis of the blues in Appalachia. Lightfoot insinuates that the music played in Appalachia was not the blues, despite having clear examples of artists like Dock Boggs assimilating blues style lyricism in his songs.⁶⁴ Boggs included slower singing styles with high paced instrumentation, which for Lightfoot, led him to describe the songs of Appalachian musicians, that imitated blues rhythm, as an off-shoot of old-time music. But what is this other than the blues? Raising pertinent questions about status and power over what genre a music is and is not. For Lightfoot, and as Miller points out, this understanding of blues influence is lost on scholars who understand a genre as one or the other, rather than a cross-cultural practice.

This contradictory approach ignores entirely the influence artists like Ray Charles had on country music. Strict cultural guidelines on what genre a music is, falls in line with the notions of authenticity, and the problems of folklore categorization. When in fact, all songs are generally the product of some cross cultural exchange, questioning the idea of authenticity as it pertains to music. The shared problem amongst scholars such as Lightfoot, "is a commitment to the concept of a folk tradition not only as a historical reality but also as the primary way in which to examine people's relationship to each other, their past, and commercial culture...racial traditions function as the frames for their studies, defining their object and scope of inquiry."⁶⁵ The very fact

⁶³ Miller, *Segregating Sound*, 6-9.

⁶⁴ William E. Lightfoot, "The Three Doc(k)s: White Blues in Appalachia," *Black Music Research Journal* 23, no. 1/2 (2003): 167-93.

⁶⁵ Miller, *Segregating Sound*, 279.

Lightfoot provides accounts of blues styles existing in Appalachian music in the 1930s-40s, demonstrates Appalachians were hearing the music and they were recording it their own way. Dock Boggs even believed the blues would free him from the mines in the mountains, which it did not, however, he would become one of the most influential bluegrass artists due to this experimentation.⁶⁶ Diversity of cultural interaction, and navigation of different styles, demonstrate the way in which folklore has bounded cultures via “race and sound.”⁶⁷ Insisting on these strict paradigms reduces musicians and people alike to a specific homogenous culture. Music, like culture, is a hybridization of many influences, and as previous chapters provide evidence of this, the growing concern of purity only leads to more confusion. Accepting a genre and its influence also means recognizing its hybrid nature and the processes of creativity and assimilation. As Miller clearly addresses throughout his work, people in the South, particularly in Appalachia, listened to all kinds of music and still do to this day. There was no hesitancy from consumers to buy certain styles of music, it was only the marketing strategy of the music industry that sought to sell music based on race. The importance of authenticity the record companies placed on music, limits the ways in which scholars have analyzed the many cross-cultural hybridity across genres.⁶⁸

By promoting authenticity in music, the stories of family life in Black homes have been flattened out amongst scholars. The everyday activities in the South by these families help tell the untold stories of how they experienced music via dance, built an identity in the many Black communities they lived, and the continual under-acknowledgement of the dynamic changes

⁶⁶ Lightfoot, “The Three Doc(k)s,” 178.

⁶⁷ Miller, *Segregating Sound*, 279.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 102-5.

occurring both musically and historically.⁶⁹ With much of the scholarly focus on authenticity, genuine stories of Black life are left unanalyzed and forgotten. Karida Brown exerts this point in her work, *Gone Home: Race and Roots Through Appalachia*, where tens of thousands of Blacks moved in and out of Appalachia in search of freedom, citizenship, and work between 1910-1970.⁷⁰ Making their livelihood in coal towns like Harlan, Kentucky, many of these stories of Black oppression and struggles are unknown to most of the population because these areas of Appalachia are not seen as authentic areas of Black life, despite providing evidence of Black stories in a region that enforced the same racial structures found elsewhere.⁷¹ Promoting authenticity in any manner can lead to a troubling erasure of histories that only enables further racist leanings of general and musical history. In an era of Black migration out of the South, and from the Caribbean islands to the Northern U.S. cities, new developments and “the interplay of historical circumstances, of intragroup memories, of instrumental and lyrical gestures, and of personal agency and style created a powerful Afro-modernism at midcentury and a cultural scene of lasting consequence in the American consciousness.”⁷²

During the era of Black liberation and consciousness, the prominent Black artists James Brown and Ray Charles were at the crossroads of Civil Rights and wrote music that addressed the many problems Black people face in the U.S. Ray Charles accomplished this through his album, *Modern Sounds in Country and Western Music* (1962). He identified the ways in which music was racially bounded, but also that country music’s base audience listened to jazz and

⁶⁹ Ramsey, *Race Music*, 84-95.

⁷⁰ Karida Brown, *Gone Home: Race and Roots Through Appalachia* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2018), 2-3.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 58-66, 98-9.

⁷² Ramsey, *Race Music*, 130.

blues and vice versa.⁷³ At this time, white artists were attempting to reinterpret Black styles and profit from it, so Charles sought to do the same, after all he was born in Georgia and grew up listening to old-time country music. Charles's album reinvigorated country music in a time when rock and roll was dominating the airwaves, his reinterpretation of classic country songs in jazz and r&b tenets helped the record sell across genres.⁷⁴ Country radio stations and popular magazines distanced the ties between the record and country music despite its extreme popularity amongst other genres. Around the same time, however, the newly formed Country Music Association, an association created as a marker of country music's marketability and blue collar audience, embraced the album to negate many of the stereotypes of southern backwardness and dumb southern hillbillies.⁷⁵ Also, much like the development of blues, jazz and funk, they understood the mass migration of people moving to urban centers, and by establishing a blue-collar aristocracy they created music that could reach that audience as well. Charles's album perfectly demonstrates the class antagonisms present in the U.S. regarding who could perform what music, and around the Civil Rights era these messages resonated more than they would have twenty years earlier. Charles primarily sought to challenge the notions of what made a country artist, by experimenting with Black and white vernacular and musical styles and challenging the notions of race and class in music. Charles uses of swing bands, and supposedly "white" styles, "produced a rendition that subordinated racial difference to a narrative about class and appropriate versions of whiteness."⁷⁶

⁷³ Diane Pecknold, "Making Country Modern: The Legacy of Modern Sounds in Country and Western Music," in *Hidden in the Mix: The African American Presence in Country Music*, ed. Diane Pecknold (Durham: Duke University Press, 2013), 82–99.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 85-90.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 91. Diane Pecknold, *The Selling Sound: The Rise of the Country Music Industry* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2007), 174-5.

⁷⁶ Pecknold, "Making Country Modern," 94.

During the 1960s, around the same time as Charles' album, the Civil Rights movement was concluding, and musicians in both jazz and blues were writing music to reflect the actual history of Blacks in the U.S. Illustrated throughout, Black musicians attempted to flee from oppressive conditions in the South to make a career in music. Artists like Duke Ellington, Paul Robeson, and Marian Anderson brought jazz music and Black spirituals to stages and performances around the country in protest against racial injustice. From the beginning of African American musical traditions, Black musicians continually battled to have their voice heard on the stage. Fighting engrained stereotypes, violence, and poverty, among many other issues, Black musicians were beginning to speak back against the injustices in society and people were starting to listen. Ron Eyerman and Andrew Jamison's work, "The Movements of Black Music: From the New Negro to Civil Rights," provides a pivotal discussion of the development and importance of the Civil Rights Movement and the Black musical tradition.⁷⁷ The many Black movements that took place in the 1920s, led by Marcus Garvey, incentivized, among other things, racial pride, and self-esteem in Black settings. Defined as a working-class movement, Garveyism inspired many Black musicians, with W.C. Handy and many blues and jazz musicians performing at events with these ideas present in their lyrics and style.⁷⁸ These artists used multiple genres of music and combined Black artist's songs "through a collective music...to relate the black musical tradition directly to the cause of black nationalism."⁷⁹ Organizations like the New Negro, and the NAACP, provided spaces and frameworks for social, political, and economic policymaking. In sum, these organizations and movements were social

⁷⁷ Ron Eyerman and Andrew Jamison, "The Movements of Black Music: From the New Negro to Civil Rights," in *Music and Social Movements: Mobilizing Traditions in the Twentieth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 74–105.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 85-6.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 86.

movements where people could “express their identities through cultural innovation...music, as we have seen, was a prime source of identity for many African Americans.”⁸⁰

Music, while not always political, social, or economic, can operate as a place of resistance and creativity against white supremacist forces. Whether the music is sung in the fields as W.E.B Du Bois understood, or in Christian churches, the minstrel stages to resist the white degradation and othering of Blackness and flip those narratives, or over the airwaves, it provides an avenue to protest racial injustice. The segregation of race and old-time music led to the development of new more innovative music that could combat the white music industry’s commercialization of Black music. The history of Black music in the U.S. is filled with historical relevance, and it tell the stories white elites erased lifting Black voices, despite efforts to suppress them. Black music was prominent in mainstream American culture, but often the terms of its popularity were set by white hegemonic commercial interests.⁸¹ In 1954, bus boycotts across the South were taking place, with spiritual music, often sung in Black Christian churches, operating as an organization of the boycotts themselves. As the boycotts developed, the music did as well and it “served as a source and sign of strength, solidarity, and commitment.”⁸² Using traditional spirituals such as “Walk together Children,” the protests incentivized walking as opposed to taking the bus systems, unifying those protesting racial injustice. Singing traditional spirituals and popular music from artists like Ray Charles and Aretha Franklin, the Civil Rights Movement sought to connect individuals, white and Black with music. Singing r&b tunes and

⁸⁰ Ibid., 88-9.

⁸¹ Ibid., 90-4.

⁸² Ibid., 98.

spirituals also helped link the movement to those incarcerated, providing morale and courage in the face of injustice.⁸³

These songs reached people across the nation, and throughout the 1960s, songs such as “I’m Going Down to Mississippi,” and more famously Bob Dylan’s song, “The Lonesome Death of Hattie Carroll,” was bridging geographical and supposed cultural gaps between whites and Blacks. Music served as a unifier, a notion of brotherhood and tolerance in the face of white supremacy. The March on Washington in 1963, exemplifies the work of Martin Luther King Jr. and the religious and secular components of Black musical traditions.⁸⁴ As Black singers Mahalia Jackson and Marian Anderson performed, the songs they sang both sacred and secular, illustrated the goals and ideology of the movement. An ideology of unity, strength, hope, resistance, and freedom. Through these songs the movement “was made real and objective, and it is in their recollection that the movement can be recalled and reexperienced.”⁸⁵ Similarly, Islamic influences abounded during the Civil Rights movement due to many jazz musician’s ambivalence towards the Christian church. Slide Hampton, a Black trombonist, described the Baptist Christian church his family attended, as unethical, since Christian churches oversaw the unethical treatment of Black people. With no true remedy available in the Christian church, Hampton among many other jazz musicians converted to Islam.⁸⁶ By converting to Islam, Black jazz musicians were also afforded new job opportunities, and many became communists because communist organizations were the few that provided work for them in the 1940s.⁸⁷

⁸³ Ibid., 100.

⁸⁴ Ibid., 101-3.

⁸⁵ Ibid., 102-3.

⁸⁶ Horne, *Jazz and Justice*, 128.

⁸⁷ Ibid., 129.

With racial tensions rising around the country, the militancy of both leftist leanings and nationalist Islamic teachings attacked the institutions of Jim Crow by protesting the clubs and music spots that were white-owned or run by the mob, demanding equal treatment.⁸⁸ By the 1960s, jazz was going through one of its the worst periods financially due to the rise of rock and roll and the coverage it received internationally. Despite the passing of Civil Rights legislation in 1964, Black jazz bands still faced harsh injustice when traveling through the South. Organized Crime, which had robbed many Black artists of their livelihood, continued their practices despite the current anti-Jim Crow movements. Black musicians struggled to get jobs, as often whites were given an opportunity despite being less talented. Many Black jazz musicians like James Moody, left the U.S. to find freedom and make a living elsewhere. Having experienced the wrath of racial violence that was Jim Crow, it is surprising he, and many others, did not leave earlier.⁸⁹ Jazz musicians were, however, heavily involved in the Civil Rights Movement, despite being ridiculed, attacked, and forced overseas for better opportunities. Many organized concerts such as, “Jazz for Civil Rights,” and “October Revolution in Jazz,” encouraging Black musicians to take part in the movement and end Jim Crow legislation.⁹⁰ Max Roach, a Black jazz drummer and composer, and his wife Abbey Lincoln, responded musically in their album, *Freedom Now Suite*, which celebrated the Emancipation Proclamation and linked the Civil Rights Movement to the liberation struggles in Africa, Latin America, and Asia.⁹¹ By raising funds and combatting racial prejudice, Roach and Lincoln fundraised for the Civil Rights movement, and were involved alongside Malcolm X. Max Stanford, or Muhammad Ahmad, a leader of the Revolutionary Action Movement in the U.S., briefed Roach and Lincoln as if they were fellow

⁸⁸ Ibid., 131-3.

⁸⁹ Ibid., 248-50.

⁹⁰ Ibid., 253-7.

⁹¹ Ibid., 257-8.

combatants against the oppressive white hegemony around the world.⁹² As the music became more militant, critics backlash only heightened. Jazz writers and critics were disgusted because “the ascent of a kind of Black Nationalism was then reflected in a musical turn” and endangered their hold over the genre that sought justice for their mistreatment.⁹³ Despite different mechanisms in jazz music, Black artists used their talents, experiences, and political and religious leanings to protest Jim Crow and usher in a new era of social consciousness in Black cultural practices.⁹⁴

This leads back to Ray Charles’ protest of the music industry, and his genre bending crossover album that illustrates further the power of music in social movements. It also provides a clear continuation of race and class issues that white music industry executives continue to brush over. After Charles’ death in 2004, much of the emphasis of his album *Modern Sounds In Country and Western Music* shifted to race relations for the country music industry. His album, although never making the country charts, was now being praised by current country artists as a great accomplishment despite it coming out forty years earlier. This was an effort to de-whiten the genre and distance country music from its racist history. A clear attempt to reckon with history, but only on their terms. In 2007, Jamie Foxx, having played Charles in the recent biographical film, took the stage at the Country Music awards to sing alongside the popular country band Rascal Flatts.⁹⁵ The symbol of Foxx as a stand in for Charles was required as a special legitimization for him to grace the country music stage, demonstrating the racial undertones present in country music. Foxx was viewed as a direct connection to Charles and

⁹² Ibid., 259.

⁹³ Ibid., 260.

⁹⁴ Ibid., 260-1. Ingrid Monson, *Freedom Sounds: Civil Rights Call Out to Jazz and Africa* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007).

⁹⁵ Pecknold, “Making Country Modern,” 95-7.

likely only received this opportunity to perform on stage because Gary LeVox, the lead singer of Rascal Flatts, had been his roommate in the 1990s.

Foxx never sang alone on stage, again emphasizing the ironic nature of country music's pursuit of social mobility, allowing, and recognizing Black performers in country music, but only on the Country Music Association's terms. Even with the posthumous reconciliation of Charles as a country artist, which provides some reconfiguration of the racist nodes in country music, it also symbolizes "the continuing elisions of inequality that lay at the root of the album's original reception."⁹⁶ Taking forty years to officially recognize, the Country Music Association continued to perpetuate class and race issues in the music of Charles. Further illustrating how the music industry was trying to reach a target audience while holding onto many of the racial signifiers country music was founded on. Moving into the era of post industrialism after the Civil Rights movement, new musical styles, and cultures such as hip hop develop to attest to the struggles of Black America in the inner cities and urban environments where many had migrated. As the Black Power movement began to take hold in the late 1960s, the emphasis was on Black people loving themselves for who they were. The impact music has, and continues to have, throughout the U.S. is still under question, but it also becomes more apparent the roles music plays in enacting social change in some degree. Hip hop is, much like most genres analyzed throughout, a mixture, a hybrid of many different cultural influences. Rap music today exist to express Black pride and Black consciousness, but also to profit from Black lifeworlds.⁹⁷ Tricia Rose remarks that, "rap music is a black cultural expression that prioritizes black voices from the margins of

⁹⁶ Ibid., 97.

⁹⁷ Ron Eyerman and Andrew Jamison, "The Movements of Black Music," 104.

urban America.”⁹⁸ The question becomes, what is hip hop and rap, and what does it mean to the reckoning of racist institutions?

Hip hop Empowerment in an Era of Oppression

The era of hip hop is one often marred with controversy, while also simultaneously regarded as the vanguard for Black youth in the US post 1980. But it existed years before the 1979 smash hit “Rapper’s Delight” by The Sugarhill Gang, popularized the genre overnight. Rap was mostly an underground music scene in New York, via the mass migrations of African Americans into the city from the South and Caribbean regions and it acted as a form of musical expression for people in these communities. Like most of the music analyzed, hip hop has varied roots, with its roots in blues, funk, and newly imported Caribbean styles. The meshing of these various musical cultures created, with notable differences of lyric delivery and musical rhythm, a fast paced poetic style of lyricism known as ‘rap.’ Usually, accompanied by specific beats either created by the artist or from samples of another artists adding to it, rap gave Black youth a place to express themselves in a world that denied it.⁹⁹ Hip hop itself is not a monolithic static form of music, but one in constant development, as numerous scholars attest this to the diverse cultures that exist in hip hop.¹⁰⁰ Frequently challenging the modes of authenticity, while also embracing them, hip hop is placed in a precarious position as both a project of resistance and as an assimilation to status quo and corporate interests. As illustrated later, Molly Geidel provides a nuanced understanding

⁹⁸ Tricia Rose, *Black Noise: Rap Music and Black Culture in Contemporary America* (Hanover: Wesleyan University Press, 1994), 2.

⁹⁹ Mark Anthony Neal, *What the Music Said: Black Popular Music and Black Public Culture* (New York: Routledge, 1999), 125-6, 136-40.

¹⁰⁰ Reiland Rabaka, *The Hip Hop Movement: From R&B and the Civil Rights Movement to Rap and the Hip Hop Generation* (New York, Lexington Books, 2013), 1-5. Samuel Craig Watkins, *Hip Hop Matters: Politics, Pop Culture, and the Struggle for the Soul of a Movement* (Beacon Press, 2005).

of how hip hop provides hope and resistance from jails in Appalachia, despite the racial connotations associated with the region.

This, however, is the case with most popular music that sells at high rates globally, as it can reach places unthought of, and the popularity of hip hop is astronomical with a market share of 27.7% in mid-2019 up to over 28% in 2020.¹⁰¹ While these numbers are impressive, it is worth noting more music is likely consumed during a pandemic where millions of people are stuck working from home. But the choice to play hip hop, according to these statistics, leads to interesting questions about its relevance in political, social, and economic cultures. What does hip hop say that is so enticing to its audience? What does it represent? What connection does it have with citizens? Where does it fit in with models of solidarity in the US, but particularly in Appalachia? Answering these questions gives impetus for an analysis of hip hop, both past and present. An exhaustive history and development of hip hop is not the goal, as this has been done many times. Rather I want to place emphasis on what this music means to people, and the messaging it conveys to both Black and white communities.

Ramsey's survey of the early development of hip hop is critical. His reliance on Baraka's philosophy of translation jazz or any music, emphasizes hip hop must first be examined through Black experience, knowledge, and local cultures to produce any valid scholarship on it.¹⁰² Similarly, Talal Assad in his work, *Genealogies of Religion*, describes these problems in the field of anthropology, claiming scholars not from the area or of the ethnicity they study must not

¹⁰¹ Tim Ingham, "Hip-Hop Is Still Growing-With Over 50% of the USA's Top 100 Streaming Tracks of 2019," *Musicbusinessworldwide.Com*, January 19, 2020, <https://www.musicbusinessworldwide.com/hip-hop-is-still-growing-with-over-50-of-the-usas-top-100-streaming-tracks-of-2019/>. ED Christman, "Album Sales Drop, Hip-Hop Surges as Pandemic Colors Nielsen Music/MRC Data's Midyear Report: Analysis," *Billboard.Com*, July 9, 2020, <https://www.billboard.com/articles/business/9415846/nielsen-music-mrc-data-mid-year-report-analysis-2020/#:~:text=GENRE%20POPULARITY,genre%20commanded%20at%20midyear%202019.>

¹⁰² Ramsey, *Race Music*, 159.

enforce their own beliefs on these communities. Doing so can place a pitfall in the research, by not accurately portraying the cultures, and in this case music, they cannot speak to a culture they do not have extensive insider knowledge on. The interesting thing about hip hop is its global reach and ability to speak to many different communities at once. However, by not understanding and addressing the construction of power dynamics present in the communities and world they research, music scholars, particularly ethnomusicologists, attempt to define the world around them through preconditioned knowledge, and without understanding of the diversity present in music.¹⁰³ James Cone has similar concerns in his work, *The Spirituals and The Blues: An Interpretation*, where jazz and blues are looked down on in our society because they invoked an expression of the Black soul and the Black experience.¹⁰⁴ Black music, as a scholarly field, provides the opportunity for African Americans to tell their stories and truths, while critiquing the scholarship that said otherwise.¹⁰⁵

Hip hop is an important turning point for those focused on Black scholarship, as it is now a widely accepted genre that many have made academic careers out of the many post-colonial and critical race critiques in society hip hop provides.¹⁰⁶ Hip hop gives younger Black generations the ability to speak their pains and success and provides a deeper understanding of the social and political conditions they may face. The overnight success of hip hop in the 1980s, fueled by the discontent of policing and the infamous War on Drugs that targeted minorities, particularly African Americans, provided a voice that many in the areas affected could relate to. According to Tricia Rose's description of hip hop as 'black noise,' hip hop provides a language of expression through particular semiotic patterns and patterns as a social commentary on the

¹⁰³ Talal Asad, *Genealogies of Religion* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993). 35-45.

¹⁰⁴ James H. Cone, *The Spirituals and the Blues: An Interpretation* (New York, Seabury Press, 1972)

¹⁰⁵ Ramsey, *Race Music*, 160-1.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, 164.

structural problems many African Americans face in their daily lives.¹⁰⁷ Rap and hip hop culture provide an “outgrowth of black cultural traditions, the postindustrial transformation of urban life, and the contemporary technological terrain.”¹⁰⁸ Rap and hip hop culture are best understood as modalities of expression within a community tainted by oppressive white state racism. In similar ways, Reiland Rabaka in his work, *The Hip Hop Movement: From R&B and the Civil Rights Movement to Rap and the Hip Hop Generation*, argues that a hip hop movement exists from the years of musical development from the Civil Rights movement onwards.¹⁰⁹ Adding to this, Ramsey illustrates hip hop has many links to the musicians found in old-time blues. The case can even be made for minstrelsy, as many Black musicians got their start on the minstrel stage, flipping the racial dynamic. Thus, hip hop can be understood as a movement based on current racial dynamics.¹¹⁰ It is the hybridity of hip hop as a genre that allows it to transform itself, borrow and create new sounds from old ones that came before. This project stresses the importance of the historical trajectory and cross cultural musical roots present in bluegrass and country music, the blues, jazz, soul and rock and roll. As demonstrated, historical racial and class oppression of Blacks in the U.S. is continually met with Black musical resistance. Hip hop provides many of the links between the long-standing tensions of Black musical practice and systemic racism, continuing the tradition of both marketability and resistance.

Rabaka emphasizes that hip hop has qualities of being a leading force for a post-Civil Rights movement, particularly as a Black popular music-based politics. The complexity of hip hop itself is found in the iterations of “black language, black music, black style, and black youth

¹⁰⁷ Rose, *Black Noise*.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, 63.

¹⁰⁹ Reiland Rabaka, *The Hip Hop Movement: From R&B and the Civil Rights Movement to Rap and the Hip Hop Generation* (New York: Lexington Books, 2013).

¹¹⁰ Ramsey, *Race Music*, 133, 212-5. Karen Sotiropoulos, *Staging Race: Black Performers in Turn of the Century America* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2006).

culture.”¹¹¹ Hip hop is an extension of Black music and Black culture, which does not mean it is not made up of other cultures. Hip hop is a hybrid of cultures, languages, and religions, with no singular universal issue at hand.¹¹² The roots of hip hop are intrinsically tied to the local knowledge of African Americans in the late 1970s and 80s, a local knowledge that continues with rappers normally discussing the problems or pleasures of their life.¹¹³ By saying it is not Black music or Black culture, is to take away the impact that hip hop has in many Black communities around the world. Take for instance two tracks, the first by KRS-One entitled, “Sound of da Police,” and secondly, N.W.A.’s track “Fuck the Police.”¹¹⁴ Both songs relay police violence but from different Black local perspectives, KRS-One describes police brutality and profiling in New York as his main locale, while N.W.A. describes the situation in Los Angeles as mostly the same. Both these songs allude to the local, but also universal struggle of African Americans in the U.S. since slavery. Hip hop is a form of Black expression and a product of Black America, but it has many diverging experiences and understandings of local knowledge and racial injustice. Defining hip hop as Black music, does not disregard the hybrid nature of hip hop, rather it provides an outlet for Black experience that other genres deny, producing “unexpected encounters that lead to unexpected productions.”¹¹⁵

These unexpected encounters and productions are illuminated by S. Craig Watkins in his work, *Hip Hop Matters: Politics, Pop Culture, and the Struggle for the Soul of a Movement*, where today hip hop’s biggest claim to fame is the authenticity of selling Black death to the

¹¹¹ Imani Perry, *Prophets of the Hood: Politics and Poetics in Hip Hop* (Duke University Press, 2004). 2.

¹¹² Rabaka, *The Hip Hop Movement*, 12.

¹¹³ Perry, *Prophets of the Hood*, 203.

¹¹⁴ KRS-One, *Sound of Da Police*, CD (New York: Jive, 1993). N.W.A, *Fuck Tha Police*, CD (Los Angeles: Priority, 1988).

¹¹⁵ Perry, *Prophets of the Hood*, 13.

public.¹¹⁶ The most important thing in hip hop during the early 2000s was selling an “authentic” Black experience, similar to how minstrelsy and the blues were marketed as, as opposed to the community building potential hip hop music provided. It becomes difficult to sort through the myriad of details as to why in Craig’s assertion, hip hop matters when violence, misogyny, racism, and class depictions have continued to plague Black communities. Despite these problems, Craig’s optimism for the genre is found in hip hop’s ability to connect the youth and alternatives to these problems, by providing a voice and a vehicle to combat their own situations. Clarence Lusane adds to this in his illumination of Black poverty in the 1980s and 90s, particularly regarding the Black youth in New York, Los Angeles, Houston, and Oakland where poverty rates soared and employment was sparse.¹¹⁷ Hip hop emerged around the same time that radio stations were playing unproven music, and these new hybrid sounds were speaking to populations that are systemically targeted, abused, killed, and blamed for problems in society.

With the release of “The Message,” by Grandmaster Flash and the Furious Five in 1982, those problems of poverty and violence were addressed to the Black community writ large. Much like the songs of the blues, hip hop addresses the many social and political issues that the Black community is facing, and it did this while also obtaining mass popularity around the world.¹¹⁸ Hip hop was triggering young people to want to change the world around them, highlighting the problems of racism, class, voter suppression, poverty, and other issues, hip hop provides a voice for Black youth while at the same time commercializing it. It is this dual nature of commercialization and empowerment, that makes hip hop both a legitimate form of Black expression, and a mass-produced white capitalist version of Black life. Hip hop sales began to

¹¹⁶ Samuel Craig Watkins, *Hip Hop Matters: Politics, Pop Culture, and the Struggle for the Soul of a Movement* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2005), 2.

¹¹⁷ Clarence Lusane, “Rap, Race and Politics,” *Race & Class* 35, no. 1 (July 1, 1993), 43-4.

¹¹⁸ Watkins, *Hip Hop Matters*, 21.

explode in the 1990s and 2000s, but early numbers did not match hip hop's actual success as the market share and charts were determined by Billboard, who sought to discredit the genre.

Billboard's methods to determine market shares were archaic, as they asked retailers which genre of music was selling and which album was selling more than others, as opposed to hard sales data. The subjective nature of this polling indicates the power dynamics and white domination of musical endeavors, as those at the top of Billboard used their influence to enable artists they were more comfortable with.¹¹⁹ They could decide who was popular, despite the sales or lack thereof, and hip hop, much like country music was looked down on. With the invention of new systems such as SoundScan, which used a point-of-sale system using barcodes on records which sent all the information about how many albums were sold and where they were sold, music sold from retailers was no longer based on subjective leanings and picking and choosing. But rather hard data was sent directly to music industry executives, forcing them to admit to the mass popularity of hip hop.¹²⁰ What is interesting is the underreporting of both hip hop and country music by stores, which provides evidence of the racial, class, and cultural predispositions the music industry used to demonize or ignore certain forms of music. Even with the invention of systems like SoundScan, and later iTunes, SoundCloud, and Spotify, among others, there still exists a hesitancy to accept hip hop due to the raw lyrics and pulsing rhythms. Early on, in many ways, hip hop was analyzed in similar ways that the banjo and African dance were classified, as a form of Black music that is not pleasant and extremely localized, yet eventually widely accepted and profited from.¹²¹

¹¹⁹ Ibid., 33-7.

¹²⁰ Ibid., 37.

¹²¹ Cecelia Conway, *African Banjo Echoes in Appalachia: A Study of Folk Traditions* (University of Tennessee Press, 1995).; Karen Linn, *That Half-Barbaric Twang: The Banjo in American Popular Culture* (Urbana: Illini Books, 1994).

Racial understandings of hip hop are ever apparent through denunciation or depiction of Black people in film and advertisement, down to the scrutiny of the lyrics even today. Anthony Kwame Harrison in his work, *Hip Hop Underground: The Integrity and Ethics of Racial Identification*, provides an understanding that much of the rap and hip hop musical performances have relied on Black racial identities, and “reinforces and refutes racial stereotypes and assumptions.”¹²² This reliance on a supposed Black identity delivered through a propagation of ghettoized Black criminality, sexual tendencies, misogyny, and apparent ‘thug’ nature, gave way to an influx of white suburban youth consumers who wanted a piece of Black culture.¹²³ The movement from local rappers to more corporate understandings of hip hop is attributed to the mass popularity of gritty depictions of Black life, setting trends for the present and future of hip hop. Notably, capitalistic endeavors of artists like Jay-Z, who accepted the capitalist mindset creating Roc-Nation, a mega conglomerate that represents some of the biggest names in hip hop and sports and providing ‘hits’ that could play on the radio, indicates how hip hop is profitable.¹²⁴ Jay-Z, however, also provides support to social justice and poverty afflicted areas with monetary and vocal support.¹²⁵ Providing another example of this dual nature of profit and social awareness in hip hop.

The massive gains made by artists represents a postmodern shift in hip hop, as multi-million-dollar deals are given out, artists understandably begin to line up. They start to reinvent soundscapes, provide new understandings of life, and new authenticities. Russell Potter in his

¹²² Anthony Kwame Harrison, *Hip Hop Underground: The Integrity and Ethics of Racial Identification* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2009). 28-9.

¹²³ Watkins, *Hip Hop Matters*, 88-109

¹²⁴ *Ibid*, 76.

¹²⁵ Taylor Lewis, “The 10 Not-So-Publicized Times Jay Z and Beyonce Gave Back,” *Essence* (blog), February 1, 2017, <https://www.essence.com/lifestyle/do-good-brothers/10-not-so-publicized-times-jay-z-and-beyonce-gave-back/>.

work, *Spectacular Vernaculars: Hip-Hop and the Politics of Postmodernism*, describes this as an ironic method of resistance, yet also a product of pos-modern capitalist culture. As in other decades, African Americans have mobilized and “continually transfigured and transformed objects of consumption into sites of production.”¹²⁶ It is this ironic nature of hip hop that mirrors capitalism only to constantly resist and repurpose it via new or abandoned capitalist zones. Hip hop’s operation within capitalism is indeed a complicated issue, but there is no denying the amount of influence rappers have and the amount of creative control they demonstrate within a capitalist world. The question that Potter insists must be asked is, “who’s commodifying whom?”¹²⁷ Answering such a question is beyond the scope of this project, but within these few chapters, what is obvious is the refusal of Black artists to be silenced in a world of white supremacist capitalist endeavors. Even more apparent, are the white capitalist mechanisms and historical racially segregated cultural dynamics that remain an integral part in forming and adhering to racial identity and colorblind legal doctrine. In sum, this is no different than what has occurred in the musical industry since its inception, with a creation of otherness and an emphasis on commodifying what sells and leaving the less desirable trimming to be forgotten, in this case conscious rap, the industry continues its racist capitalist operation.

Potter indicates that hip hop is continually building and creating layers of history in new profound ways. History, and the repetition of the past through hip hop, is a primary way Black culture has formed a modal of resistance in music. Imani Perry in her work, *Prophets of the Hood*, sections off this argument of repetition and history in Potter, through the lens of Jacques

¹²⁶ Russell Potter, *Spectacular Vernaculars: Hip-Hop and the Politics of Postmodernism*, SUNY Series in Postmodern Culture (New York: SUNY Press, 1995). 108, See chapter one of this work for a more detailed understanding of postmodernity in hip hop.

¹²⁷ *Ibid.*, 110-15

Attali, emphasizing late capitalism's formulaic templates of mass production.¹²⁸ Perry discusses realness and authenticity in hip hop as a product of capitalism that promotes a both Black authenticity that is directly linked to everyday life in Black communities, and the problematic depictions of the "real" in these communities as violent, misogynistic, uneducated, and in need of reform.¹²⁹ While these truths that are rapped about may not be actually true, for instance the stories 2Pac or Nas rap about, the problem is indicating what realness is or is not and if it promotes limited conceptions of what Blackness is through rap artists. Lester Spence in his work, *Stare in the Darkness: The Limits of Hip-Hop and Black Politics*, indicates, "by defining themselves as the arbiters of blackness, they also promote themselves as its representatives, claiming the right to define African American needs, interests, and identity."¹³⁰ Through this repetition, it is evident that Perry is correct in some of her assumptions that hip hop, like jazz, is a form of composition with the audience and musician. Consequently, hip hop's development into a billion dollar industry throughout the 1990s and 2000s, subsequently provided what Tricia Rose calls "hip hop in crisis."¹³¹

It is this reckoning with the past that makes hip hop so visceral, it's continual sampling of old music that the white bourgeoisie have forgotten along the way, allows for new artistic efforts. But it can also lead to problematic departures. Take for example Kanye West's track "Blood on the Leaves," which samples the iconic track "Strange Fruit," by Billie Holiday. Unlike Holiday's track, West's political messaging ends at the beginning of the song that proceeds to promote more of a misogynistic understanding of women as clout chasers and problematizes celebrity

¹²⁸ Perry, *Prophets of the Hood*, 200.

¹²⁹ Ibid., 87-93.

¹³⁰ Lester K. Spence, *Stare in the Darkness: The Limits of Hip-Hop and Black Politics* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2011), 21.

¹³¹ Tricia Rose, *The Hip Hop Wars: What We Talk About When We Talk About Hip Hop--and Why It Matters* (New York: Basic Books, 2008), 2-5.

fame. The song does little to echo the anti-lynching sentiments that Holiday intended with her song. While that can be deemed problematic by sampling a song such as “Strange Fruit,” and not addressing racism, it does opens new audiences to songs that describe racial injustice, however faint that opening may be. Kendrick Lamar’s music video for his track “ELEMENT,” does what West’s track avoids, incorporating famous Civil Rights imagery with lyrics of survival in a racist society. His verse, “Cause most of y’all ain’t real/ Most of y’all gon’ squeal/ Most of y’all just envy, but jealousy get you killed/ Most of y’all throw rocks and try to hide your hand/ Just say his name and I promise that you’ll see Candyman/ Because it’s all in your eyes, most of y’all tell lies/ Most of y’all don’t fade, most of y’all been advised/ Last LP I tried to lift the black artists/ But it’s a difference between black artists and wack artists,” allows for an understanding of the problems artists should be speaking on.¹³² Kendrick Lamar’s verses attack the realness, or lack thereof, of many Black artists he supported in the past for not speaking truths and lying about their situations. Lamar intricately places Civil Rights messaging in his video, inferring that he is attempting to promote awareness and speak to the communities he raps about. Alternatively, he accepts commercial depictions of Black life as thuggish, ghetto, and misogynistic, and he attempts to invert it through an understanding of Black empowerment. The problem is, does the white consumer pick up on these tonal shifts, or do they only want to listen to a stereotyped “authentic” Black life?

Like minstrel stage Black performers inversion of racist stereotypes of Black life through performances that addressed and fought back against racism. Some rap artists do this, and many more do not, because of the way the white neoliberal framework incentivizes the promotion of

¹³² Jonas Lindsroem and the little homies, *Kendrick Lamar - ELEMENT.*, 2017, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=glaG64Ao7sM>.

stereotypical imagery. In another way, this process of “reanimating “dead” sounds, bringing repressed histories back to vivid life, hip hop sustains a profound historical consciousness, all of which serves to frame contemporary struggles within a continuum of African-American history.”¹³³ What good then is reanimating these sounds if no one listens? The incorporation of sampling of popular tracks from the likes of Parliament, George Clinton, and James Brown allow for this reanimation, a recall from history, a new narrative twist with old influences. By flipping expectations, and providing voices for the voiceless, rap artists often promote middle-class Black values, as well as hyper-masculinity. Rap in this perspective “works like blues and black folklore, communicating and critiquing reality and providing tales of black men,” although while blues and Black folklore helped Blacks make sense of and negotiate their conditions of subjugation, it did not overturn them.¹³⁴ Hip hop is a form of archival work that allows rap artists to tell stories their way, and Black popular music is more than the vices and vulgarities found in commodified music, it is the expression and recollection that makes it powerful for so many.¹³⁵ These vices and vulgarities, however, are of importance, as hip hop continues to saturate our world and understandings with realness. There must be an account of what or why a specific song sells, and the importance of placing realness as a feature of their rap album.¹³⁶

The late 1980s and early 1990s birthed the genres gangsta rap and gangsta funk, as artists with gritty lyrics and a “ghetto realism,” provided “vivid tales of gang life, police brutality, crime, poverty, violence, sex, drugs, and drinking, but also...each consistently used classic funk samples as the basis of their overall “gangsta” sound.”¹³⁷ Artists like Tupac, Warren G, Snoop

¹³³ Potter, *Spectacular Vernaculars*, 118.

¹³⁴ Spence, *Stare in the Darkness*, 22.

¹³⁵ Rabaka, *The Hip Hop Movement*, 34.

¹³⁶ Spence, *Stare in the Darkness*, 21-3. Perry, *Prophets of the Hood*, 95-7.

¹³⁷ Rabaka, *The Hip Hop Movement*, 265.

Dogg, N.W.A.(which includes Ice Cube, Eazy-E, Dr. Dre, MC Ren), and Ice-T, were all creating and distributing distinct sounds from west coast experiences that were immediately accepted around the country. The massive popularity and high sales numbers meant two distinct, although not entirely disconnected, things; 1) people were listening to the music these artists were creating globally, and many resonated with it, 2) many listening cared very little about the political and social messages of urban life, unless it was about guns, drugs, murder, and sex.¹³⁸

Rose's analysis of hip hop as a genre muddled with white commercial interests, underscores the reason why what is often heard on the radio are songs about death, murder, misogyny, and other stereotypes of Black life. This only furthers the historically racist beliefs of Black criminality that has existed in the American conscious since the inception of the music industry.¹³⁹ While problematic, the gangsta rap era of 1988-1996 provides stories of the experience of Black ghetto youth through narratives on racist government policies, the prison industrial complex, poverty, increased gang activity, and commentary that these racist government institutions have failed them and created these problems.¹⁴⁰ Some lyrics embody misogyny, homophobia, sexism, and violence, but just as many lyrics in gangsta rap is emblematic of struggle, hope, and progress. Eithne Quinn in her work, *Nuthin' But a "G" Thang*, provides a complex interwoven story of gangsta rap through the music of several artists, and most notably, Tupac Shakur. Despite the neoliberal tendencies in many of his tracks, Tupac's music opens conversations about "politics and identity within a historical context of declining political consciousness and increasing inequality."¹⁴¹ Gangsta rap is often conscious in

¹³⁸ Ibid., 266-70.

¹³⁹ Rose, *Hip Hop Wars*, 84-5.

¹⁴⁰ Rabaka, *The Hip Hop Movement*, 270.

¹⁴¹ Eithne Quinn, *Nuthin' But a "G" Thang: The Culture and Commerce of Gangsta Rap* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005), 179.

its messaging, despite its entrepreneurial success, and oft ignored are the socio-political messages conveyed in the music, in favor of criticism for the problematic lyricism. Quinn argues that gangsta rap cannot be taken at face value and it is not a static genre. But rather, it is a product of an ongoing history marred with problems of commercialization, technology, messaging, and profit.¹⁴² This is not condoning any of the problems found in hip hop, but it is the historical paternalism over Black people and their expression that makes gangsta rap an extension of the many race and class problems that exist in Black and brown communities. The color line in music, like the color line in social, political, and economic institutions, still exists and must be accounted for in any analysis of race.

Hip hop politics are intricate and contradictory, but they are also liberating through their controversy and inversion of negative Black stereotypes. One song in particular, “Neighbors,” by J. Cole, emphasizes the nuance present in hip hop political statements. In the song, and subsequent music video, Cole raps about his life and how he is exhausted with his struggle to make money and the constant discrimination he faces simply because he is Black. Cole, in the track, alludes to answering the door where the police are insisting that the neighbors think he is selling dope, presumably because he is Black. To which he replies, “well motherfucker, I am.”¹⁴³ This song is a primary example of how rap plays with the racial perceptions and leans into stereotypes, while also explaining them away. Rap’s political messages resonate with many Black listeners that understand what it is like to be targeted for the color of their skin, and to always have death looming over them despite them doing nothing wrong. Hip hop provides a political lens for white folks, both young and old, to understand or gain some knowledge about

¹⁴² Ibid., 184-91.

¹⁴³ J.Cole, *Neighbors*, YouTube (New York: Roc Nation, 2016).

the problems in U.S. society, but it may also provide more problematic depictions of “real” Black life. In an ingenious way, Cole, like many other rappers, places the responsibility on the listener to listen to the message and decipher it themselves. He does this knowing that much of the news coverage and parental concern will problematize drug dealing and language present in the song as opposed to understanding the lyrics as a metaphor for racism. But he likely also knows this track will sell across the country. While this song is ambivalent, it resonates as a reminder that rap, much like its predecessors, reinforces regressive understandings of Black life to combat them with progressive political messages that attack the lack of truth in racist stereotypes.

Hip hop vernacular requires listening and an education of the genre, artists, and issues rapped about. Simple reductions of hip hop as “thug” music, or one genre is the first mistake. Hip hop has multiple patterns of expression ranging from Muslim rap, Christian rap, conscious rap, Grime, Southern Rap, and commercial and gangsta rap, among others. Many different types of people resonate with the messaging and hip hop, and they seek to apply it to their life experience. These many genres provide different polyvocal expressions of Black life, sometimes in regressive ways, but it is usually done to try and make sense of the social world that exists.¹⁴⁴ Similar to the music of the Civil Rights Movement, hip hop provides narratives, chants, and songs that resonate with current times to change them. The banjos played and danced to, used for and by enslaved Black to express themselves and rebel, is indicative of the music produced today that is met with similar criticism that it too has no place in society. Much like the banjo, hip hop is now a profitable capitalist expenditure distorted by white music industry elites who harbor the gains and attempt to suppress the messaging in the music. Rap music’s influence on politics is

¹⁴⁴ Rabaka, *The Hip Hop Movement*, 285-91.

nothing new, it is the present modality of Black expression that informs the many stories of anguish, joy, and progress of the many generations of Black musicians and people alike.¹⁴⁵ Under current social colorblind racism, hip hop's contradictions exist in "simultaneous invisibility and hypervisibility of Black American youth...this contradiction of the invisibility of actual racial segregation and the hypervisibility of a new, mass-media-constructed, multicultural America."¹⁴⁶ Black American youth are repeatedly subjugated to the adverse effects of globalization, despite the false mass media depictions of Black success that feed into colorblind racism worldwide. Accompany this with a lack of racist policy reform and effective political strategies, Black youths' ability to exist, and thrive, in a world that trivializes their existence is incredibly difficult if not impossible.¹⁴⁷

Spence argues that while rap and hip hop provide voices and narratives for many Blacks excluded from American political structures, often the alternative reality it promises looks much like the one that already exists.¹⁴⁸ Spence's remarkably well researched argument analyzes four hundred and seventy eight lyrics from over three hundred different rap artists between the years 1989-2004. Impressively, Spence correlates the connections between these lyrics and current free-market fundamentalism, or neoliberalism. In doing so, Spence indicates that rap exposes Black exclusion in neoliberal capitalist policies, they are the exception within neoliberal institutions. Black men and women and often left out of capital enterprise, and rap enables voices not traditionally heard in the Black public expanding the amount "of participants within black discursive spaces."¹⁴⁹ Rap is, however, a globally marketed phenomenon that brings in millions

¹⁴⁵ Ibid., 290-310.

¹⁴⁶ Collins, *From Black Power to Hip Hop*, 7.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid., 7-10.

¹⁴⁸ Spence, *Stare in The Darkness*, 17.

¹⁴⁹ Ibid., 26-7.

of listeners at once, making the chance for profit high. Knowing this, rap artists, much like urban elites, are forced to market aspects of their cities and neighborhoods to generate capital investment.¹⁵⁰ Urban spaces are largely viewed as Black in hip hop, and scholars have not adequately analyzed the role neoliberal capitalist policies have in shaping realness and authenticity. Rap artists use their neighborhoods as marketing tools and emphasize traits in these areas that they are self-proclaimed experts.¹⁵¹ Associating realness with neoliberal commercialization, “listeners and non-listeners already view the urban spaces hip hop represents as black,” so the music and narratives of drugs, violence, and Black representation often portrayed in rap songs are then understood as real Black conflict.¹⁵² In this context, rap artists use the real by separating authentic and inauthentic representations of life under white neoliberal economic order. Using the exempt places of capital, a place that cannot be profited from, rappers use the representation of these spaces as a marketing tool for commercialization.¹⁵³

Acknowledging the commercialization of the genre, rap artists frequently discuss the problems with police and legal policies. Often, however, the reactions against policies in Black communities are accepted by rap artists, and they acknowledge they must abide by the law. Rather than acknowledging the crime, or its circumstances, the rap artist Bloods and Crips react against stereotypes of Black work ethics by dealing and using drugs. In essence, they are also neoliberal subjects despite what mainstream media defines them as, because they show entrepreneurship in dealing drugs, only working to subject the Black experience for further exploitation.¹⁵⁴ Within these realist rap tracks, those critical of neoliberal systems do exist, but

¹⁵⁰ Ibid., 27.

¹⁵¹ Ibid., 28.

¹⁵² Ibid., 33-7.

¹⁵³ Ibid., 38-9.

¹⁵⁴ Ibid., 41-6.

they are not as populous. Using the example of Ice T's track, "Hunted Child," Spence provides, through first-person narrative, the social conditions of poverty in his neighborhood are critiqued and better visualized. Similar artists also address the problems of crime in Black neighborhoods and define it as Black exclusion, critiquing the problems of criminality in their communities.¹⁵⁵ Often rap artists use geographic locales as a connector to the ills and problems of society, as listeners can become better acquainted with artists portrayal of violence and injustice. Kendrick Lamar's masterpiece, *good kid m.A.A.d city*, does precisely this, inviting the listener into his own personal life and stories of his home in Compton.¹⁵⁶ Throughout the album, Kendrick deals with police violence, crime, addiction, religion, and a demonstration of what racial injustice in Compton, California looks and feels like. At no point is Kendrick attempting to glorify or market his community, instead his lyrics do precisely the opposite. In his track, "Money Trees," his verse, "Dreams of living life like rappers do/ Bump that new E-40 at the school/ You know big ballin' with my homies/ Earl Stevens had us thinking rational/ Back to reality we poor, ya bish/ Two bullets in my uncle Tony head/ He said one day I'd be on tour, ya bish," demonstrates his own personal difficulties in his neighborhood.¹⁵⁷ The song emphasizes the hustle many must endure to get any form rest, some shade under the money trees made from drugs or music, and the imminent death that Black people face. This track operates as a critique of poverty, violence, and drug trafficking, as a line in the chorus illustrates, "But the one in front of the gun lives forever...Money trees is the perfect place for shade and that's just how I feel," viscerally reminding the audience the only way to get relief from this imminent death is to make money any way possible.¹⁵⁸ Rap artists like Kendrick Lamar, who critique systems of inequality, racism,

¹⁵⁵ Ibid., 47-9.

¹⁵⁶ Kendrick Lamar, *good kid m.A.A.d city* (Los Angeles: Top Dawg Entertainment, 2012).

¹⁵⁷ Kendrick Lamar, *Money Trees*, YouTube Music (Los Angeles: Top Dawg Entertainment, 2012).

¹⁵⁸ Ibid.

violence, and the role mass media have in reproducing the conditions, are usually less popular than those that do not. He has been the exception of late, as he is one of the most prolific rap artists in the world, with many anxiously awaiting his latest work. Kendrick Lamar's music is likely so popular because he directly addresses the structural conditions generating the problems in communities that have been exempt and forgotten to white neoliberalism.¹⁵⁹

With mass commercialization and neoliberal interests present in the U.S., Black people and spaces are understood as exceptions, corrupt, and criminal. Much of the real and authentic rap reproduces these beliefs by describing the ghetto as violent, Black men as criminal, and Black women as simple breeders. While rap does critique these problems in the white supremacist neoliberal order, it also reproduces them.¹⁶⁰ Even artists like Kendrick Lamar, who critique the racist systems that exist within the U.S., fall into the trap of critiquing Black culture for the problems in his community. In the track, "The Blacker The Berry," a call back to Tupac Shakur, Kendrick Lamar's verse, "So don't matter how much I say I like to preach with the Panthers/ Or tell Georgia State, "Marcus Garvey got all the answers"/ Or try to celebrate February like it's my B-Day/ Or eat watermelon, chicken, and Kool-Aid on weekdays/ Or jump high enough to get Michael Jordan endorsements/ Or watch BET 'cause urban support is important/ So why did I weep when Trayvon Martin was in the street/ When gang banging make me kill a n***a blacker than me?/ Hypocrite," clearly blames Black culture for problems of structural racism and asking for racial justice makes him feel like a hypocrite.¹⁶¹ Many spoke out against the cultural shame politics Kendrick Lamar used, and it raises important questions as to

¹⁵⁹ Spence, *Stare in The Darkness*, 50.

¹⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 54.

¹⁶¹ Kendrick Lamar, *The Blacker The Berry*, YouTube Music (Los Angeles: Top Dawg Entertainment, 2015).

what the limits of rap and hip hop are, particularly when it is in a neoliberal commodified world.¹⁶²

Being cognizant of the limits of rap music is important, but scholars and listeners must keep in mind that hip hop can and does open new spaces for expression and political involvement in Black communities. Rap operates as “Black America’s CNN,” because it relays messages across communities, cities, and people. It brings issues up within Black communities and elsewhere that may have never been addressed otherwise.¹⁶³ The questions that must be answered within Black cultural politics is how mass commercialization in Black politics can be turned towards a “thick definition of black politics, toward a conception concerned with creating new possibilities for Black life.”¹⁶⁴ Rap and hip hop narratives, despite being a product of similar racial coding of previous eras of Black music, demonstrate that “care should be taken to limn the exceptions—those local cases in which individuals are able to use hip hop and other forms of black diasporal popular culture.”¹⁶⁵ Hip hop and rap provide a voice, despite the mass commercialization of the genre, that creates new possibilities for a new world.

The similarities between hip hop and the plethora of Black expressive music that came before it, is its association with religion, and how that shapes much of the messaging not just in hip hop but in religious understanding. Ramsey indicates the role of church in Black communities as a form of communal recounting, and in his many interviews with Black families he learns church was a way to express one’s self in music.¹⁶⁶ Echoing this, Collins elaborates

¹⁶² Rob Markman, “Kendrick Lamar Has Strong Words For His ‘Blacker The Berry’ Critics,” MTV News, April 3, 2015, <http://www.mtv.com/news/2123601/kendrick-lamar-billboard-blacker-the-berry-critics/>.

¹⁶³ Spence, *Stare in The Darkness*, 166.

¹⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 174-5.

¹⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 175.

¹⁶⁶ Ramsey, *Race Music*, 4, 140-5.

that, “existing research indicates that African Americans are, by many measures, highly religious people” and that often the Black church, which is here associated with Christianity, provides many avenues and cultural blueprints for community activism and social action.¹⁶⁷ The continuation of history and memory are performed through hip hop, with commentary on religion and its role in African American life.¹⁶⁸ Anthony Pinn’s work, *Noise and Spirit: The religious and Spiritual Sensibilities in Rap music*, asserts that religious practice and teachings are often ignored in rap music, despite the fact that “rap music has profound connections to the various religious traditions found within African American communities.”¹⁶⁹ This is not to generalize any culture as overtly religious or not, however, the religious sentiments found in hip hop from its inception are undeniable. Hip hop and religion are entangled, but the definitional variance of what religion confirms that to untangle hip hop and religion, “we must begin by rethinking the religious.”¹⁷⁰ The continued entanglement of race, class, and religion provide further indication of the messiness of a solidarity movement grounded in music.

Rethinking the Religious in Hip Hop

Rethinking the religious is an insurmountable task, one that this project is not tasking itself with. However, Monica Miller in her work, *Religion and Hip Hop*, demonstrates the vices of hip hop from outsider observers, is that hip hop does nothing but incentivize “thuggish” and misogynistic behavior based in the “confines of Christian analysis and Constricting theological

¹⁶⁷ Collins, *From Black Power to Hip Hop*, 84-5.

¹⁶⁸ Ramsey, *Race Music*, 214-5.

¹⁶⁹ Anthony B. Pinn, ed., *Noise and Spirit: The Religious and Spiritual Sensibilities of Rap Music* (New York: NYU Press, 2003), 20-1.

¹⁷⁰ Monica R. Miller, *Religion and Hip Hop* (New York: Routledge, 2013), 2.

categories.”¹⁷¹ White social hegemonic constructions only continue to breed racist, and class based assumptions that hip hop has no religiosity involved in it. This short sighted approach only suggests the impact religion is having on hip hop, as opposed to how hip hop itself embodies the everyday Black youth struggles, thus operating as a religion. The solution from theologians and white Christian evangelism is to ignore the lived experiences of the youth they seek to reach. Religion from this perspective is a “sanitizing agent” that works to rid them of the supposed corrupt lyrics and sentiments found in hip hop.¹⁷² Morality and cleanliness, historically have been used to describe Christian rhetoric and white supremacy, and anything that challenges this is immoral, unclean, and must be cleansed. Religious messaging in hip hop challenges this by rethinking, re-imagining, and dismantling all forms of power within current religious understandings and fallacies.¹⁷³ The power of this rests largely in the hands of scholars who create the social, political, and religious texts that are widely read and disseminated in the field. The Christian church is a social hegemonic construction that attempts to sanitize hip hop to make it usable for everyone, particularly whites.¹⁷⁴ Rappers like Tupac, are like the original banjo players in Appalachia, as they are both griots for the modern world, telling the struggles of life for Black youths and keeping the messaging “real” by subverting dominant Christian understandings of morality through nihilistic, but very real, self-questioning that Tupac engages with.¹⁷⁵

Are rappers’ pastors then? Most emphatically, yes! Rap is a spiritual practice that “conjures the spirit” through bringing noise and lyricism, it provides an experience that is not

¹⁷¹ Ibid., 14.

¹⁷² Ibid., 15-8.

¹⁷³ Monica R. Miller and Anthony B. Pinn, eds., *The Hip Hop and Religion Reader* (New York: Routledge, 2015).

¹⁷⁴ Monica Miller, *Religion and Hip Hop*, 75-84.

¹⁷⁵ Ibid., 86-94.

just physical but spiritual.¹⁷⁶ Mark Taylor's analysis of hip hop, through Levi Strauss' understanding of music, as "a transformative mode of expression, shaping and shaped by other experiences-temporal and spatial, physical and cultural," indicates that hip hop shapes modern experience of those who listen.¹⁷⁷ This aligns with Miller's sentiments of religion being more than social and political hegemonic institutions, it reflects the everyday life experiences not accounted for. Religion defined as a practice, fundamentally ignores the power of these institutions and the activity that takes place outside of religion.¹⁷⁸ Rap operates within religion as a form of "polyrhythmic layering" by continually referencing, using different beats and voices to recall the past, but also bringing forward the future in a way that allows for the response of the crowd through anticipation and recollection.¹⁷⁹ Rap is a continual reflection and contestation of abrasive racist political institutions through the knowledge of suffering and action of protest. Hip hop accounts for, and brings in, the many Black spirituals, work songs, jazz, and blues melodies in a distinguishable rhythm for both resistance and pleasure. The narration of alternative stories depicting police brutality, poverty, racism, and structural inequality for the powerless, empowers hip hop listeners with a "spiritual practice" through liberatory methods to destabilize "dominant discourses and patterns."¹⁸⁰

Rap is liberatory in its "raptivism" in local grass roots organizations, one of which, the Prison Moratorium Project, which advocates against the prison industrial complex through connections to rap and religion to help ex and current inmates regroup their lives.¹⁸¹ Miller also

¹⁷⁶ Mark Lewis Taylor, "Bringing Noise, Conjuring Spirit: Rap as Spiritual Practice," in *Noise and Spirit: The Religious and Spiritual Sensibilities of Rap Music*, ed. Anthony B. Pinn (New York: NYU Press, 2003), 108-9.

¹⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 111.

¹⁷⁸ Monica Miller, *Religion and Hip Hop*, 128-36.

¹⁷⁹ Taylor, "Bringing Noise, Conjuring Spirit," 112-5.

¹⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 118-9.

¹⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 121.

provides evidence of these processes through hip hop dance known as Krumping. Krumping provides a quest for meaning by evoking bodily movements to resist dominant structures and move youth from the problems on the streets to a place of expression. Much like the Prison Moratorium Project, “Krumping provides an alternative cultural sphere that highlights not only faith in the flesh but an aggressively therapeutic way to express and perform daily struggle.”¹⁸² Rap and hip hop culture are always within a liminal operation of being in between liberatory aspects and oppressive ones.¹⁸³ On one hand hip hop seeks to liberate its listeners through reformulations and polyrhythmic depictions of the problems that many Black youth face, and on the other it is trapped within violent and oppressive sensibilities, along with the varied commercial neoliberal ideologies weighing on artists. Taylor demonstrates that often rap music can and does promote liberation, while simultaneously contradicting its messaging with misogyny. For example, Tupac’s album, *Strictly 4*, in which one song, “Keep Ya Head Up,” promotes feminism and loving Black women. However, a few songs earlier in the album, the track, “I get Around,” discusses women as an object of his desire that he controls.¹⁸⁴ It is precisely these contradictions that problematizes hip hop, while also allowing hip hoppers and Black artists to deal with the complexities of liberation. These tracks highlight the ways in which the drive for liberation must continue in a forward trajectory, rather than grounded in problematic imagery and terminology. Problematizing the neoliberal trajectory of hip hop is difficult, because without much of the commercial interest and extraction would these narratives be heard at all? Thus, it is the liminality of hip hop that allows for truth and painful messaging as a way of healing and liberating the past, present, and future.¹⁸⁵

¹⁸² Monica Miller, *Religion and Hip Hop*, 175.

¹⁸³ Taylor, “Bringing Noise, Conjuring Spirit,” 122-3.

¹⁸⁴ 2Pac, *Strictly 4 My N. *. *. *.Z...*, YouTube Music (Los Angeles: Interscope, 1993).

¹⁸⁵ Taylor, “Bringing Noise, Conjuring Spirit,” 123-7.

Hip hop artists and culture use their ability to weave all these complexities together and integrate experiences that demonstrate a form of spirituality that brings noise to Black youth life, allowing them to express their concerns on a world stage. Ralph C. Watkins claims that hip hop has replaced religion in Black communities in a multitude of ways. Rappers like Tupac Shakur, Ice Cube, and Kendrick Lamar, all challenge religious doctrines presented by the Christian church to find meaning in their life. The main problem that exists for rappers is that the Christian church has not actually solved their problems, and they question God's love in the ghetto.¹⁸⁶ Using Christian religious symbolism, rappers have created their own religion, in which those who have died in the streets will go to a "ghetto heaven," allowing for a nuanced conception of heaven for the many who experienced hell on earth. In other words, hip hop artists continually borrow from other religious doctrines and reframe it in their own world, refining what religion means and why it matters to those that do not meet the clean and moral expectations of modern religion.¹⁸⁷

Therefore, hip hop is much more than a genre that exploded in the 1980s, it is a recollection, re-packaged, liberating, liminal, and integrative socially conscious music that seeks to usurp dominant discourses with new meanings from the many forgotten Black lived experiences. The hesitation towards this is not unwarranted, as problems of violence, antiblackness, white commodification, and racist stereotypes pervade. Asserting the logic of Angela Davis, however, the music itself cannot change the world, it is the movement of people through an organized protest that does that.¹⁸⁸ Whether it be localized, national, or even global,

¹⁸⁶ Ralph Basui Watkins, "Rap, Religion, and New Realities: The Emergence of a Religious Discourse in Rap Music," in *Noise and Spirit: The Religious and Spiritual Sensibilities of Rap Music*, ed. Anthony B. Pinn (New York: NYU Press, 2003), 184–7.

¹⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 190-2.

¹⁸⁸ Angela Davis, *Blues Legacies and Black Feminism*.

music provides the narratives and reasoning for social justice in their fight against racism, poverty, police brutality, and whatever issue exists in a locale. Women have also taken it upon themselves to resist misogyny via hip hop, using it as a tool of empowerment and liberation from systems of oppression, yet another complexity within hip hop that cannot be ignored and something that needs to be further researched.¹⁸⁹

Hip hop matters because it empowers Black youth and all other populations to speak their truths and resist forms of oppression. A quick look at past social movements demonstrates similar patterns, but with hip hop it is a continual denial of racism, not one that fades away. As gangsta and commercial rap can, and do, diminish many aspects of what hip hop was originally about, the new wave of conscious rappers has eloquently spoke back against the systems of oppression. Artists that include Kendrick Lamar, J. Cole, Common, A Tribe Called Quest, 2Pac, Biggie Smalls, The Roots, Public Enemy, KRS-One, OutKast, and Talib Kweli, among many others, who speak to the problems of racial and class injustice in American society. Kendrick Lamar, currently among the most notable hip hop artists, having won a Pulitzer prize for his album *DAMN.*, and his music is becoming central in many of the Black Lives Matter protests.¹⁹⁰ The continual repetition of the past, and recollection of the present, makes the form of conscious rap freeing for many. What is left is the connection back to Appalachia, towards my home, my friends, and my family, so they too can join with those that suffer from structural racism, classism, disenfranchisement, and poverty. The question I continually ask myself is do my friends and family want solidarity with Blacks who suffer beside them? Why not join hands with

¹⁸⁹ Collins, *From Black Power to Hip Hop*, 161-90.

¹⁹⁰ Pulitzer Staff. 2018. "Kendrick Lamar: DAMN. 2018 Pulitzer Prize winner." Url: <https://www.pulitzer.org/winners/kendrick-lamar>. Date accessed: 12-3-18. Andrew Limbong, "Both Party And Protest, 'Alright' Is The Sound Of Black Life's Duality," NPR.org, August 26, 2019, <https://www.npr.org/2019/08/26/753511135/kendrick-lamar-alright-american-anthem-party-protest>.

people that will only help your cause? As my concluding remarks make clear, hip hop in Appalachia is already prominent, it may just take revisiting the past and making connections in the present. In sum, there needs to be a continual reckoning of the history of racism and the development of the music created from racist oppression that reinforces but also resists institutions of white supremacy.

Concluding Towards Home

This chapter provides evidence for the growing importance of hip hop in our world, but it does not provide much evidence in Appalachia. I wanted to briefly analyze hip hop in Appalachia and lead this discussion into a study on my hometown, musical democracy, and solidarity. Hip hop exists globally, and it raises different questions wherever it may reside, as music tends to do. This does not exclude Appalachia, as the rhythms of bluegrass, country, r&b, rock, and hip hop can be found in the hills of Appalachia. Although much like hip hop differences in east coast and west coast rap, “hill-hop” provides residents a way to express their troubles in the mountains over hip hop beats and fast paced lyricism.¹⁹¹ Molly Geidel’s article, “Supermaxes, Strip-mines, and Hip-Hop,” provides a different look at the stereotype of both Appalachia as a white homogenous culture, and the use of hip hop in the many communities that make up the region. From the outset, she notably presents that typical white audiences are caught up in the harmful messaging in hip hop as opposed to the liberating qualities it can provide. In Whitesburg, Kentucky, however, there exists a now defunct program *From the Holler to the Hood* which emphasizes how supermax prisons are taking over rural Appalachian towns and harming

¹⁹¹ Howard Berkes, “Hick-Hop: Hip-Hop Meets the Hollow,” *NPR*, March 27, 2004, <https://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=1794557>.

countless others in the process.¹⁹² The goal of this project is to communicate to inmates via hip hop and provide a voice for these prisoners on the radio through song requests on a local radio station in neighboring communities. This program incentivizes rural participation in politics through music, and many of the hip hop songs requested directly relate to problems white and Black people face in rural Appalachian communities. With prison populations escalating, and depressed rural areas, much like their urban counterparts, falling behind in technological advancement and labor diversity, there is little opportunity available besides these prisons, either as a job or a place of residence.¹⁹³ The same problems present in urban communities exist in Appalachia, as the post-industrial economy has burdened most, if not all, in Appalachia with high unemployment, displacement, drug abuse, lack of access to water, and housing problems, as well as the everyday events of living.

Using their knowledge of hip hop, organizers turned to local people to voice their frustrations in poems and raps about problems in their communities. The white hip hop group Kuntry Killaz, relate these messages to their friends and speak directly to residents in Appalachia, opening dialogue with residents in the region, but also outside of it, that struggle with similar problems.¹⁹⁴ With the organization's focus on prisoners, they have a weekly radio show dedicated to shout outs for prisoners, providing them with hope and much needed communication from the outside world. Hip hop is not a complicated or privileged art-form, all it requires is earnest expression and lyrics that tell a story of some kind. The collaboration of country and hip hop has also made an impact in the region, as Dirk Powell (a prominent banjo and fiddle player), and Danja Mowf (A Richmond, Virginia based MC), recorded a session

¹⁹² Molly Geidel, "Supermaxes, Stripmines, and Hip-Hop," *Journal of Popular Music Studies* 17, no. 1 (2005): 67–76.

¹⁹³ *Ibid.*, 68–9.

¹⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 70.

where Powell played banjo music and Mowf placed beats in relation to the banjo, harmonizing them, similar to previous centuries history of cross cultural influence.¹⁹⁵ Further demonstrating hip hop's ability to reach back across genres and provide a voice, a call and response for white and Blacks alike to holler from their rural areas through the process of antiphony.¹⁹⁶

Although no longer in production as an organization, Holler to the Hood made a lasting impact. The weekly call in show still exists and it still sends messages to incarcerated people in Appalachia over the radio through music, providing evidence of small, localized patterns of resistance and organizing potential that music offers. Recently, former U.S. House member Charles Booker, revived this movement under a different name, "Hood to the Holler." His program aims to combat racism and oppression in Kentucky by producing change in policies that better help the rural residents in all aspects of their lives. As his website states, "Hood to the Holler is an organization founded by Charles Booker, and is focused on leveraging the incredible momentum for positive change in Kentucky and nationally, toward the aim of building broad coalitions, breaking down barriers of race and class, and fueling a people centered movement to build political power and transform our future."¹⁹⁷ If anything, this signifies a growing understanding of solidarity in Appalachia, one that recognizes problems in the region and provides avenues for solidarity in which oppressive institutions can be overthrown for the betterment of our society. Music offers a path to combat these racist institutions present in Appalachia.

¹⁹⁵ Ibid., 71-3.

¹⁹⁶ Ibid., 74-5.

¹⁹⁷ Charles Booker, "Hood to the Holler," Hood to the Holler, accessed January 17, 2021, <https://hoodtotheholler.org>.

An example of this can be found in the music of the group Gangstagrass. Gangstagrass captures the sound of the banjo and old-time music, placing it in conversation with hip hop narratives that presents beautiful musical arrangements which considers past and present musical and historical dialogue. Gangstagrass combines many of the familiar sounds found in rural music with hip hop lyricism and polyrhythmic beats. In their songs, they discuss problems of rural and urban life, communicating that the music that has been segregated carries the same message of unity and despair. In their most recent album, *No Time For Enemies*, they provide a mixture of the banjo, hip hop beats, rap, and old-time country and bluegrass singing styles to convey messages of Black oppression.¹⁹⁸ Delving through the history of racism in the U.S., several tracks including, “Freedom,” “Ain’t no Crime,” “What I am,” and “Hard Times Come Again No More,” provide riveting accounts of the protest against white supremacy in the U.S. In the track, “Freedom,” the banjo can be heard prominently as the lead rapper, Dolio the Sleuth, raps about slavery and freedom. This is most prominently illustrated in the verse, “Our plan to reach the promised land of liberation/ we’ll be breaking chains before the beast dem awaken/ Watch the house ablaze with flames before they cave in/ No more will our pleas to the sky be forsaken/ All praises due there’ll be much celebration/ Plantation will be gone by the day’s end.”¹⁹⁹ The chorus combines country vocal styles with the rhythm of hip hop asserting, “Ain’t gonna wait no more to get this freedom.” The next verse describes the actions of civil rights protestors in the 1960s, and the laws that were passed are still not enough to fully rid of white supremacy and Black oppression. Notably, Gangstagrass’ music critiques slavery, racial injustice, and the use of the banjo to deliver these stories. This musical experiment hearkens back to Cecilia Conway’s belief that the African banjo echoes are making their way home. R-Son the Voice of Reason’s verse,

¹⁹⁸ Gangstagrass, *No Time for Enemies*, YouTube Music (New York: AntiFragile, 2020).

¹⁹⁹ Gangstagrass, *Freedom*, YouTube Music (New York: AntiFragile, 2020).

“Another Plan is a brother man in power positions/ Sisters in greater control of our conditions/
Even when it happens I doubt you’re going to listen/ But somehow consider yourself a Christian/
I’m on a mission to take these levels tilted/ Straighten it out for all my elders that built it/ Don’t
care whether or not guilt you feel it/ Not going to keep us from the freedom we will get...Take
this system and we kill it, then we flip it and rebuild it,” elaborates further on the racial
institutions and beliefs that limit Black people. Calling out the Christian faith of many whites, he
asserts that Black people will break down these institutions of racism and rebuild them as
institutions of freedom.²⁰⁰

For Gangstagrass the messaging is clear, Blacks have suffered and continue to suffer
from white systems of oppression in the U.S. They strive for liberation using the banjo and
modern musical developments such as hip hop, both of which are strongly connected to African
American cultural traditions. By incorporating this hybrid of musical influences, Gangstagrass
reaches numerous audiences and connects experiences Black and brown people face through
African and Anglo-American musical traditions. Demanding action and change in their album,
the hope is that music embracing both white and Black musical traditions can break through the
barriers of race and class we all find ourselves within. If anything, Gangstagrass provides
narratives that keep the history of African musical roots alive in the present, and they provide an
impetus to listen closer to the banjo echoes that resist all forms of oppression.

Despite the problems of mass commercialization and neoliberal depictions of Black life
present in hip hop, rap and hip hop provide Black and white communities with new spaces of
social and political expression. The music industry throughout history has attempted to separate,

²⁰⁰ Gangstagrass, *Freedom*, YouTube Music (New York: AntiFragile, 2020).

demonize, and exclude Black narratives. The voices and narratives used to speak out in rap are aligned with early Black jazz, blues, country, and banjo musicians that told their story and inverted the systems of racial oppression, despite also succumbing to them. New worlds must come from these musical echoes, both in the U.S. and Appalachia. Where then does this lead? Can cross-racial solidarity exist in an Appalachian community, and if so, what does it look like and what does it entail? These questions are impossible to fully answer, but by encouraging and incentivizing local grassroots organizations like Holler to the Hood, small changes can lead to bigger ones. Unless racism is recognized and people are made aware of these problems, these painful racist histories will never be dealt with. As colonial memories and tragedies have been replaced and covered by colorblindness and systemic racism, the history of musical resistance against these devices needs to be recalled. The painful uncovering of history for those made unaware, along with the message of solidarity in musical expression, could lead to a union of Appalachians with incentives like Black Lives Matter. A movement that accounts for the betterment of our community, region, and country will take time and has many paths to success. The goal is to first make people aware, then incentivize action to achieve change and rid our society of these oppressive racist institutions. I go to tell the story of my home in Appalachia, to reckon with the past, present, and future, of both the good and the bad.

Chapter 4: Home is Where Our Heart is: A recognition of past and present and Hope for the Future

Introduction: I need time to think!

To say this chapter and project deals with history is a fallacy. I am not “dealing” with history as much as history presents itself through text and evidence. What is of interest is lost histories, the way they are presented, and how this culture of racism and death are intricately interwoven in our institutions, practices, beliefs, and everyday life. But what about local knowledge lost to time? What about the stories of home that is never told, or so infrequently mentioned that the history fades from consciousness and people are forgotten? The stories of my hometown that are forgotten, provide indications of a history never reckoned with, rather discarded, and celebrated as justice in its absence. These stories rather it continually informs our history, social understandings, and a firm denial of justice for those not under the umbrella of whiteness. Such is the story of my hometown, which I find myself returning to.

Born and raised in Martinsville, Virginia, in the foothills of Appalachia, textile companies provided jobs they no longer do, country music was continually played over the numerous radio stations, and life is for many nostalgic. I, and likely many others, have little knowledge of the forgotten histories that defined this nostalgia, that taints it. I was not educated on the way race and class oppression exist inside and out of the region. It was in all aspects ignored, unacknowledged, and only mentioned in blanket statements during the month of February. Throughout graduate school, I find new stories, histories, and violence of racism that are hidden from me, my friends, and the country. But of all hidden things, I am always drawn back home to Martinsville, Virginia searching for histories that need resuscitation to combat

racism that is not limited to Ferguson, New York, Los Angeles, Baltimore, Chicago among other places. My home as discussed in the last three chapters is also a place of racial formation through music and racial institutions of oppression. Barbara Ellen Smith indicates that the making of Appalachia is a “racial process” that allows for whiteness to go unmarked, and whites lives supposedly free of white supremacy and privilege, a life that falsely situates white “hillbillies” as a racial minority in favor of the alternative hidden knowledge that demonstrates otherwise.¹ Racism exists in Appalachia, like anywhere else, not as an anomaly but as a status quo, one that is reenforced, embedded, and innocuous in all aspects of life. Appalachia is America, and Martinsville, Virginia, and the case of the Martinsville Seven is a lucid illustration of this.

This first section of this chapter engages with the court case known as the Martinsville Seven. A case that oversaw the execution of seven Black men for the rape of a white woman. Throughout, I weave in my own upbringing, and recorded stories from musicians in the area, returning to how this court case unfolded throughout 1950 and 1951, and how it remains invisibly interwoven in our everyday life through present acts of violence against Black people. The goal of this chapter is to provide an understanding of untold history’s never ending impact on society, while also addressing the continual failure to recognize its existence. Doing so could greatly benefit this community and others like it in the efforts for solidarity and justice. Asking why we do not tell these stories is a question that has been addressed in all chapter but remains prominent here. If I was taught these histories, the future may not look as grim for so many in the country. Those men would still have perished but reckoning with the history and telling the stories could lead to justice and more efforts to combat racial oppression in Martinsville but also

¹ Barbara Ellen Smith, “De-Gradations of Whiteness: Appalachia and the Complexities of Race,” *Journal of Appalachian Studies* 10, no. 1/2 (2004), 38–9.

throughout Appalachia. Again, this insistence of reckoning with the long history of racial oppression of Black people is not limited to Appalachia, nor am I calling people back home racist. The story I tell is one of unity and solidarity, whites, Blacks, and all others in the region joining together to address these historical ills and put a stop to them for the benefit of the entire community. It is up to residents to unearth these stories, tell them, act on them, and apply it to current conditions. Throughout, I return to Martinsville not to gain anything, but to allow for understanding and reckoning with the problems that are occurring all around us.

The legacies of slavery continue to haunt Black people, as they are continual targets of police brutality and I argue that music, history and solidarity despite problems of incommensurability is worth a thorough examination, and an application of this history could lead to a social movement that reinforces the importance of Christina Sharpe's poignant reminder of "staying in the wake."² In the second section I analyze how musical democracy can exist and get people moving within particular places. By encouraging movements within a place, like Martinsville, I suggest that the histories of racial violence and oppression explained throughout this project can be used in solidarity. Doing so requires patience and persistence, which in the final section I examine how these avenues towards a musical movement based in historical racial oppression can exist. Looking to other movements in Appalachia, the goal is to provide opportunities for people in the community through education, organizing, and protest. Bringing change to Martinsville, let alone anywhere, is more important now than ever. Telling stories through music that exists places can then spread to other places and spaces creating more movements that can then join and combat the structural race and class problems present in communities' country wide. These wounds may never heal, but it is long overdue to try and

² Christina Sharpe, *In the Wake: On Blackness and Being* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2016).

recognize the problems of our community and join the cause of Black Lives Matter. The echoes of the banjo are as loud as ever, and it is up to people to listen and act on them. There is nothing to lose, only more to gain in the area, by adopting policy that is friendly to the community and acknowledging history long forgotten to stand with those who have suffered in silence. Ending with this case study brings together the history of racial oppression in all aspects of society and brings them back to a place I am familiar with and attempts to organize via music and organizational frameworks. Telling this story, or singing these songs, may not provide all the answers, but if this changes just one person's perception that is a start. I, just like everyone back home, need time to think, plan, and move forward together in a society free of racial inequality and crushing oppression. Black lives matter in Appalachia.

The Martinsville Seven: A Case Study

Initially, I had planned on returning home and interviewing people back home on what they liked in music, what they connected to, and why music was so important. Around March of 2020, these aspirations had to be put on hold due to a worldwide pandemic and a never-ending quarantine. I wondered for a couple months how I would still be able to work Martinsville into the project and connect people through music, struggles, difference, and religion. I was, and in some ways still am, stumped on how to arrive back home that acknowledges the issue of racism present in our community on a larger scale. I am not proposing that antiracist struggles do not already exist in Martinsville, I am sure they do. The point is to provide a larger platform and organize as a community, and telling these stories helps to do that. How do I connect white class struggle with race and class struggles so many experience back home? How do I demonstrate that everyone likely wants peace, solidarity, love, and a better place to call home?

An answer of sorts came on a day when I was in Floyd, Virginia helping a friend and his mother put up a pool when she mentioned that she used to run a music store. I was ecstatic, I quickly told her of my research and my objective to revive these stories. To which she replied, “Have you heard of the Martinsville Seven?” I had never heard, and a quick google search made it clear why I had not heard of it. Black men being executed, by a court of white people, would never make it in a curriculum dedicated to capital exploits and white exceptionalism. This is an understated point as even today the courthouse in Martinsville welcomes all visitors with two confederate monuments as it has for over a century, a firm reminder of historical racism in our “colorblind” legal system. Reminders that these Black men walked past on their way to a death sentence, a sentence no white men had been sentenced to in Virginia since 1908.³ Numerous examples of racial oppression exist to support the understanding that Black history is underexamined, underacknowledged, and usually forgotten in Appalachian areas. This is due to lower Black populations in the region as well as the racial oppression of Black life that ensured such knowledge would struggle to find a place in communities, histories, and importantly over the airwaves.

Eric Rise’s work *The Martinsville Seven: Race, Rape, and Capital Punishment* reads as if these trials were happening today. With the current state of Black men and women killed by legal enforcement sworn to protect them. Recent events regarding the murder of Breonna Taylor, George Floyd, and Jacob Blake are amongst the countless others lost to a racist militarized police force and a continuation of racial patterns of oppression and criminalization. A case in Martinsville, Virginia seems unconnected to these recent events on the surface, but a thorough

³ Eric W. Rise, *The Martinsville Seven: Race, Rape, and Capital Punishment* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1998). 102.

examination reveals hidden histories of racial injustice and erasure. The events that unfolded throughout 1949 into 1951 illustrate an esoteric history, one that U.S. institutions continue to uphold and declare justice served. This story of race matters, but as Murray Forman states “it is clear that space does too.”⁴ The history of individual towns and locales shapes the culture, identity, and understandings of everyday life. The intricate details are not innocuous, rather they inculcate understandings of a certain geography, history, power dynamic and a way of living. The case of the Martinsville Seven illustrates the details that exist then and today. Exhuming history and applying it to current events and social trajectories is not an absolute method of convincing people of the problems that run rampant. Hidden histories are, however, poignant reminders of personal horror stories, injustice, and racism that do provide connective bridges across race and class barriers. These stories are a potential pathway to understanding and unity. Even if this does not establish connections like I hope, beginning here is like any other movement, a start, and that is worth a try. These histories matter and so does the resistance that comes from them.

The legacy of the Martinsville Seven begins on January 8, 1949, as a white woman named Ruby Floyd was seeking money she was owed in the city. It was beginning to grow dark in the inner city, and Floyd, when told by locals that at night people in the area like to have a good time and that she should go home, continued to look for the home of Ruth Pettie.⁵ In discussion of this case as an act of unearthing a forgotten history of racism, it also becomes a story of blatant sexism and victim blaming despite the verdict. Throughout, Ruby was continually gaslit by police and even her own legal team. Women, especially Black women, are

⁴ Murray Forman, *The Hood Comes First: Race, Space, and Place in Rap and Hip-Hop* (Middletown, Conn: Wesleyan University Press, 2002). 2.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 7-8.

not awarded the same treatment as men in social situations, especially private ones. The logic of her being warned that she would be inevitably harmed, and that it was her fault for not listening, is indicative of not only racial perceptions of violence but also that women when warned at fault for what happens next. Passing by a group of intoxicated young Black men, Floyd caught the eye of Joe Henry Hampton. Who when advised by his friends to leave her alone, continued to pursue her and initiated unwanted contact with Floyd as they continued walking out of sight.⁶ Around seven thirty in the evening Floyd knocked on the door of Mary Wade, who when inquiring about who was behind the door, the sobbing voice of Floyd replied, “A white lady, open the door quickly.”⁷

Upon letting her in, she was noted as having disheveled clothes, mud and dirt over her body, bruises all over, and red rubbed thighs. Floyd looked terrified and claimed she had been raped by thirteen men. The police were called, and she led them to the Danville and Western train tracks where the assault took place. The police identified both Floyd’s purse and watch at the scene, and on their way back to town Floyd spotted Booker T. Millner and Frank Hairston Jr. as her rapists, which the police promptly arrested.⁸ It must be noted that these men were immediately arrested at the first glance from Floyd. This is not to discredit her, but it must be noted the immediacy in which the officers arrested these men with nothing more than a belief that these were here assailants. There was no criminal record between the men, and Millner had only been in trouble with the law once for being drunk in public. This is an indication of racial profiling that made these men guilty, or presumably guilty, as soon as they were identified, similar in many ways to the events that led to the lynching of Thomas Smith of Roanoke in 1893.

⁶ Eric Rise, *Martinsville Seven*, 8-9.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 9.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 10.

Smith was lynched the day after his accusations. However, these men would be legally lynched over the course of two years.

Throughout the night and into the early morning Sergeant James Barnes of the Virginia State Police interrogated both Milner and Hairston, coercing both that the other had already told them everything, and gained a signed confession from Millner, promising leniency if he signed a confession. This statement placed six others at the scene and described the assault that several others joined in with Hampton. Barnes then gathered John Clabon Taylor as a suspect, Taylor had only a fourth- grade education and relatively small offences on his record and he worked as an orderly and tobacco worker. Importantly, these men's jobs indicate how many Blacks struggled to gain footing in anything other than service work or farming. Factory work that was beginning to define the region was almost inaccessible to Black men and women. Barnes used coercion tactics unsuccessfully to get Taylor to speak, but when using the same method on James Luther Hairston, a twenty-one-year-old furniture worker, he admitted that seven men had "gone to" the woman.⁹ No lawyers were present during these interrogations and it was late in the night. Regardless, the Virginia State Police used tactics of intimidation and coercion that indicate these men were already in the eyes of local officials because of their race and the reported crime. Howard Lee Hairston, James' eighteen-year-old half-brother directly implicated himself saying he tried to have sex with her but "could not get it in."¹⁰ By six a.m., Barnes proceeded to interrogate Francis DeSales Grayson, who at thirty-seven years was by far the oldest of the suspects. Grayson initially denied the accusations, but later admitted that he heard the woman on the Danville and Western railroad tracks crying out for help. He went home and returned later

⁹ Ibid., 12-5.

¹⁰ Ibid., 15.

with John Taylor and James Hairston along with the four other men assaulting Floyd.¹¹ Fearing mob justice, Barnes moved the six men to a Patrick County holding cell outside city limits, as they continued to search for Joe Hampton. Hampton was a nineteen-year-old with the reputation of being a “troublemaker,” because of his history of larceny and skipping probation. Twenty-four hours after Floyd’s statement, Hampton turned himself in, admitting to the rape with a similar story. In fear of a lynch mob due to the severity of the crime, circuit court judge Kennon C. Whittle ruled that the police should continue to keep the prisoners outside Martinsville.¹² At this point it is clear a crime had been committed, one of a horrible nature that likely scarred and traumatized Ruby Floyd in more ways than one. The argument is not whether a crime was committed, rather how justice, or lack thereof, propped up a white racial hierarchy and continued southern racial codes of justice that sentenced these men to death because they were Black.

Throughout the early court hearings, defense attorneys relied on questioning Floyd’s judgement to enter a Black neighborhood late at night. The defense relied on victim blaming and a continuation of racial stereotypes that portrayed Black men as violent sexual predators. Essentially, the defense argued Floyd should have known better. Floyd, despite all of this, steadfastly repeated that she begged to be let go, and that she was repeatedly threatened and raped by multiple men despite her attempts to free herself. Upon hearing the case, Judge M.H. MacBryde of the Martinsville Circuit Court ruled the men be held without bail. On April 11, “the grand jury, composed of four white men and three African American men, indicted each defendant on one count of rape and six counts of aiding and abetting rape by the other defendants.”¹³ The Martinsville court trial demonstrated a movement away from lynch mobs and

¹¹ Ibid., 16.

¹² Ibid., 17-9.

¹³ Ibid., 23.

older forms of southern justice, but still relied on the codes of racial behavior through “modern police methods and legal processes that emphasized the preservation of community stability and social order.”¹⁴ The punishment these men received is a verdict I was never aware of, but a precedent that all Black men are.

Around this time, like much of Appalachia, Martinsville was undergoing a rapidly changing economy, with large textile companies such as DuPont, Bassett Furniture, and Hooker Furniture supplying the city and surrounding county with jobs. Martinsville, an independent city within Henry County, was becoming economically affluent in the early 1940s as employment and income were relatively high compared to other places in the region. The population in the county pre-textiles and manufacturing was half Black, which slowly declined to one-fourth as most of the factory jobs available were reserved for whites and many Black residents sought work outside of the city, state, and region.¹⁵ This is a common thread in Appalachia communities explained in the scholarship of William Turner, John Inscoe, William Shapiro, John Eller, and Helen Matthews Lewis, among others. Black workers had to look elsewhere for employment to survive, and those that remained in the area found work in the service industry and agriculture, which typically paid less.¹⁶ Today, after most, if not all, of these factories and textile jobs left the area. Currently, the Black population in the city of Martinsville is around fifty percent, and in Henry County it is around twenty-two percent. The per capita income measured in 2014-2018 for Henry County is \$21,501 with a poverty level of 14.6%, and Martinsville’s per capita income is \$22,669 with a poverty level of 19.5%.¹⁷ With much of the Black population living in the city,

¹⁴ Ibid., 23.

¹⁵ Ibid., 25-7.

¹⁶ Ibid., 27.

¹⁷ U.S. Census Bureau, Henry County, Virginia; Martinsville city, Virginia (County). Retrieved from: <https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/table/henrycountyvirginia,martinsvillecityvirginiacounty/RHI225219#qf-headnote-a>. 2018.

the poverty rates indicate that racial codes enacted early in the development of the region still apply for Black people, many of whom continue to live in poverty. Consequently, these stats indicate that since the decision of these cases in 1951, the economic climate in the area has grown far worse for the Black population.

From my own personal experience of the city, Martinsville is indeed a racially divided city. Those with wealth and affluence is visible for all to see on the streets of Mulberry. If one goes deeper in the city, however, the poverty is more visible. People, the majority of which are Black, live in close quarters and less maintained homes. Visible throughout the inner city are derelicts of industry and family homes. In these descriptions I am not attempting to be fatalistic of the city, as people living in these conditions, live full lives with family, friends, and decisions that impact them, and should not be defined by poverty. If the opportunity arrived for better pay and housing, there is little doubt they would take advantage of that opportunity. The problem for most is a lack of opportunity due to the departure of jobs, jobs Black were not likely to receive, and the historical racism of the region make it difficult for Blacks to live a life free of threat and poverty. Driving to work every day I was made aware of both the riches and the impoverishment of my home. Growing up most people I met were usually kind and caring, if not guarded, and were just trying to live their life the best they could. I am now aware, for Blacks, it was infinitely more difficult to do this. If you only read stories outside the region you likely hear stories that define my friends and loved ones as subjects of abject poverty and nothing else. How do I connect back to my hometown? Why do these seven men mean so much to the future of a solidarity movement? How do we then remember? It is clear to me now, that for change to come, not only should these histories be remembered but they should be accounted for. We must be accountable for the historical atrocities of racism.

Historically Martinsville has been an anti-Black city, with segregated Black communities, that still exist. The Ku Klux Klan also made a return in the area in the 1920s, with leaders of the hate group running for, and winning, local political office. Combine this with a poor education system and Civil War monuments that sit beside the courthouse, further embedding racism into the citizens, and Martinsville is the hallmark for the southern racist strategy.¹⁸ Akin to these trials, the Scottsboro Boys offered the legal pallet for police and judges who wanted to avoid lynch mobs, but still generate death sentences for Blacks. In 1931, nine Black men were accused of rape by two white women and the subsequent trials saw “eight of the nine receive the death penalty.”¹⁹ Through the appeal process, the International Labor Defense, a communist group committed to helping African Americans with legal and discriminatory abuse, garnered a deal that would save all the men from the death sentence and legally absolve four. In the appeal the lawyers argued, successfully, that excluding Blacks from juries and denying legal counsel, they had violated these men’s due process rights guaranteed by the Fourteenth Amendment.²⁰ The Scottsboro trials detail a gross injustice, but instead of addressing the problems of racism in legal institutions, this case spurred a more cautious legal system that relied on fulfilling all aspects of due process that would justify the court’s extreme sentences against Black men. By adhering strictly to a racist legal code, the courts could enable new forms of southern justice in courtrooms. Thus, avoiding lynch mobs, but still get the desired result of Black death through legal lynching.

Similarly, the denial of due process in Martinsville was an enabling element of racial superiority present in the history of the U.S. In 1900, Charles Hairston, a Black man received the

¹⁸ Rise, *The Martinsville Seven*, 27.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 56.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 56.

²¹ James E. Goodman, *Stories of Scottsboro* (New York: Vintage Books, 1995).

death penalty for the rape of a white girl. No lawyer in Henry County would represent him, illustrating how people were not concerned with equal justice if it concerned a death sentence for a Black man. In their eyes, that was equal justice. Therefore, southern justice, as understood in Martinsville and elsewhere, is primarily concerned with upholding white vengeance against Black people.²² Racial values were reinforced not by mob justice, but in controlled courtroom environments reliant on white southern justice. The habitat of racial justice shifted from swift lynch mobs to swift trials that white elites in the area presided over. These beliefs were upheld by Judge Kennon Caithness Whittle, endeared with fusing matters of racial code, and preserving the ideals of law and order, called all attorneys for the case of the Martinsville Seven into his chambers. Judge Whittle demanded that decorum and professionalism be always adhered to. He insisted that all parties involved be addressed as if they were the same race. In short, Whittle, like most of the white community, believed race relations in the community to be harmonious and that race in this case was not a factor. These beliefs were exacerbated by newspaper journalists who only provided superficial understandings of the social and economic inequalities in Martinsville. The historical consensus remained the same, and the assumption that Black folks are ok with their limited sphere of influence and activity persisted.²³

During the 1930s and 40s several social Black organizations began challenging these subservient positions. The NAACP had made ground in Martinsville, garnering fifty-four members and “convinced the city registrar to allow all eligible blacks to register to vote.”²⁴ A huge accomplishment considering the Civil Rights Act was around twenty years away. While the NAACP represented black defendants, this case faced an uphill battle of problems. The first

²² Rise, *The Martinsville Seven*, 27-8.

²³ *Ibid.*, 29-30.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 31.

being that if the men were tried in Martinsville, they would not be afforded a fair trial due to bias in the community. This was already demonstrated by the methods law enforcement implemented by holding the defendants in out-of-town jails and eight affidavits and eleven articles from the *Martinsville Bulletin* claiming these men could not be given a fair trial.²⁵ The defense's attempts to move the trials outside of Martinsville were halted by several witnesses claiming the defendants could receive a fair trial, although much talk in the community was centered around the presumed guilt and death sentence the men should receive.²⁶

Presumption of guilt is an important part of this story. What fair trial can exist when members of the community are calling for executions? There were no mobs, there was no hostile march of torches and Klan members seeking racial justice. Occurring instead was a growing sentiment that the law will ensure that the men will get the punishment they deserve, that white order will be upheld, and the Black population would go along with it. As emphasized throughout the mobs did not exist in the street, they existed in the courtrooms. Recalling the Scottsboro Boys trial, one of the accusers testified in court she had lied and none of the men had touched her or the other supposed victim. They had lied because both women were vagrants on a train, unmarried, and both had men with them. Fearing they would be arrested for vagrancy, and that they would be smeared for fornication they decided to blame the Black men who were on the train for a crime they did not commit. Despite this revelation an all-white jury found the men guilty by of rape and eight of the nine sentenced to death.²⁷ None of the men were ever executed and since the trial all have posthumously been granted their innocence. This case, however, solidified the racial lynching capability of the U.S. court system. No matter if the Martinsville

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 31.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 32-5.

²⁷ Goodman, Barak. 2001. *Scottsboro: An American Tragedy*. Online. Documentary. PBS.

Seven were innocent or guilty the court would incite mob justice through other methods and Scottsboro operated as a case study.

I struggle with connecting this case to modern situations but reminiscing about home I do see themes played out in these cases existing in current form. Albeit subtle situational context, whether it is a white boss shepherding over Black workers while paying no attention to white workers on prolonged breaks. Along with the continual questioning of why a Black person is somewhere as opposed to another, an acknowledgment of societal place and norms. Again, I am not targeting individuals for being overtly racist, rather these established norms have infected our cultural understanding of what “freedom” looks like. Rampant poverty, systemic health problems, educational funding, teen pregnancy, drug addiction are all part of cyclical problems of race and class. Poor whites, Blacks, and members of the Latinx community suffer from these problems but the division placed between race blurs the problems of class in America. Poor whites do not want to be associated with other racial groups despite being bound in similar class constructs.²⁸ The illusion of race, and something I view as an “oppression Olympics” blinds many white folks of seeing the predicaments that their fellow Black neighbor is going through. There is no doubting many in Martinsville struggle to get by, but history demonstrates that Black folks not only struggle with similar problems, but they must deal with the problems of racism, violence, and the continuation of legal modes of slavery. History provides insight into these patterns, whether it be a clearly racist policy or act of violence, or an opaque racism such as color-blindness. The neoliberal illusion of capital prominence has set impoverished whites against all others, although they too often suffer similar fates as those they are opposed.

²⁸ Barbara Ellen Smith, “De-Gradations of Whiteness: Appalachia and the Complexities of Race,” *Journal of Appalachian Studies* 10, no. 1/2 (2004): 38–57.

Ironically, as the rich get richer these divides have only become wider and more complex when they should not exist.

Demonstrated in the trial of the Martinsville Seven is a denial of equal treatment based on racist white community codes. For example, to save some of the defendants from the death penalty, the men's attorney William Joyce asked that each defendant be tried separately. As a group they were more likely to face one sweeping conviction, separate trials at least provided hope that some men would be spared due to their lack of involvement. Judge Whittle granted this request, with each trial requiring a separate jury. The jury pool consisted of both Black and white citizens, with the prosecutors creating extremely strict criteria for members of the jury, resulting in all-white juries deciding each trial.²⁹ The juries were stacked against the defendants, much like in Scottsboro, but they were selected under current racist legal codes that enabled white southern justice. As the prosecution made their case, they relied heavily on the testimony of Ruby Floyd, who vividly described her rape and struggle with the men. According to the testimony of Floyd and the seven, a crime had been committed and the defense's sexist attack at Floyd's credibility and her own culpability in the rape demonstrated the inexperience and problematic race and gender relations present in the South. Additionally, they relied on the defense of youth and intoxication of the defendants, as opposed to the racism in both the jury selection, sentencing, and interrogation.³⁰

Joe Hampton, Booker Millner, James Hairston, and Frank Hairston testified for themselves and their testimony matched the sequence of events Floyd provided. They did, however, claim "that none of the men had assisted another in raping Mrs. Floyd and that the

²⁹ Rise, *The Martinsville Seven*, 36-7.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 37-41.

victim had made no effort to resist.”³¹ Calling into question abetting a rape and consent, they described that Hampton had followed her as she ran away from his call, the rest urged him to stop as he proceeded to catch up with her. When they found Hampton on the bend of the track, he was laying on top of her. Hairston testified that Hampton said he had paid the woman five dollars and proceeded to move her into the woods where the other three followed. Millner claims he went to the woman but could not rape her due to her saying she had kids and he lost the urge to do so, despite Floyd not having children. Frank Hairston admitted to intercourse with Floyd, and corroborated the events Millner described, but he added that Floyd did not resist him in any way.³²

When the other three arrived, James Luther Hairston, DeSales Grayson, and John Taylor, James Hairston detailed the order of the events at the train tracks and persisted that she did not resist, only one was with her at a time, and they did not hit her or hold her down.³³ They all provided similar excuses that they were young, intoxicated, and did not have control or memory of their actions. Millner pleaded with the court, “I know I did wrong going down there fooling with the lady. I should have went and called help. By me drinking though I don’t reckon my mind let me do it and so I ask the Court to have mercy on me.”³⁴ All the men but Millner, and Howard Hairston admitted to having sexual relations with Floyd, but the most controversial aspect of the witness’ stories was how Sergeant Barnes gained and read the confessions back to the defendants. Barnes had taken down the confessions promising leniency, however, he never read the statements over or back to the defendants because he was attempting to gain a

³¹ Ibid., 41.

³² Ibid., 42.

³³ Ibid., 42.

³⁴ Ibid., 43.

confession and swift sentence.³⁵ The confessions were filled with contradictions in both the typed and handwritten notes. Barnes admitted in court that he should have read over the confessions more thoroughly before entering them into evidence.³⁶ The defense closed by bringing on character witnesses who begged for the life of the defendants, solidifying the defense's weak strategy to escape the death penalty. Not once did they question Barnes' errors. Upon hearing the defense's closing statements the Court proceeded to define the crime of rape as "punishable by five years to life in prison, attempted rape or abetting a rape by three years to life, and assault and battery by no more than twelve years in prison," with all but assault and battery punishable by death.³⁷ On May 3, 1949, after only two hours deliberating, the jury for each trial found every defendant guilty of rape and recommended the death penalty.

Judge Whittle announced the ruling to the court and scheduled the first four defendant's executions on July 15th, and the last three on July 22nd.³⁸ The guilty verdict was not a surprise given the evidence of the crime, but the death sentences shook the Black community in Martinsville. The defense came under scrutiny, and many accused them of doing the bare minimum while the defendants headed towards a death sentence. Notably, the defense of Joe Hampton only argued that he was young, uneducated, and intoxicated and he should not be bestowed the highest penalty for the crime of rape. By not abandoning the efforts to avoid the death penalty and attempting to place doubt on the guilt of the defendants, the defense left the trials in the hands of all-white juries who had "virtually unlimited discretion in sentencing."³⁹ Curiously, none of the attorneys questioned the discrepancies of Barnes' copies of the

³⁵ Ibid., 43-4.

³⁶ Ibid., 45.

³⁷ Ibid., 47.

³⁸ Ibid., 48.

³⁹ Ibid., 49.

confession. Instead, the strongest, and most problematic, defense ushered by Will Joyce, attacked Ruby Floyd's character and decision-making. Blatantly sexist and victim blaming, this defense demonstrates both the way women should behave themselves in the South, while also upholding the false criminal stereotypes of the Black male rapist. These trials "not only punished unruly blacks who violated criminal statutes and racial and sexual taboos; they also reminded local women of the imagined costs of violating established codes of behavior for white females."⁴⁰

The Martinsville Seven trials maintained the status quo in the community, not with lynch mobs, but with a white Court that sought similar legal avenues. What began as a local matter, quickly attracted national attention that brought in prominent Black leaders and communist organizations. Black and radical socialist presses picked up the story and sought to find an avenue to end racial discrimination in the U.S. The contrast between whites and Blacks, particularly in the South became the lynchpin, as "even Nazi war criminals, an editorial asserted, had received greater due process protections than has blacks in the South."⁴¹ Communist parties, particularly after the depression, became greatly aware and sympathetic to the Black fight for freedom and justice. The International Labor Defense (ILD) is perhaps best known for their role in the case of Angelo Herndon. Herndon was charged with insurrection for passing out communist pamphlets with information on unemployment insurance, equal rights for Black people, and self-determination for those living in the Black Belt. The ILD won the case in the Supreme Court in 1937, providing a blueprint to battle racial injustice present in the southern legal system.⁴² In 1946, the ILD along with the National Negro Congress, the National

⁴⁰ Ibid., 49-51.

⁴¹ Ibid., 54.

⁴² Ibid., 55.

Federation for Constitutional Liberties, and the Southern Negro Youth Congress combined resources, forming the Civil Rights Congress (CRC).⁴³

The strategy for the CRC was to place public pressure on racist institutions. By mobilizing citizens and protests, and generating popularity and recognition in Black communities, they were moderately successful. The CRC, however, generated fear of extremism from other prominent Civil Rights organizations, most notably the NAACP. The NAACP feared that the supposed militant strategy of taking to the streets in protest would only create more problems than it would solve. Today, with examples of political mobilization spanning from the Civil Rights movement to Black Lives Matter protests, it can be understood that without these movements no change would have taken place. In Ferguson, Missouri, due to the killing of Michael Brown in 2014, many took to the streets and learned firsthand the violence white supremacist American police forces were willing to inflict on those that refused to accept a racially inferior status.⁴⁴ “Hands up, don’t shoot!” became a rallying cry for many around the country in wake of several incidents involving Black men and law enforcement that often left the Black man dead.⁴⁵ In the 1940s and 50s the NAACP, however, preferred legal avenues as the primary method to combat racism. In some ways it has provided relief, but it could never fully address the systemic racism found in policies and culture that still exists in the U.S. Early on, however, the goals of the NAACP were aligned with the many needs of the Black community, and not just explicit legal troubles. In 1938, upon the appointment of Thurgood Marshall as full-time counsel, these goals changed. Under Marshall the NAACP was “irrevocably wedded to the legalistic method of combatting racism in America,” whereas the ILC and CRC were aligned

⁴³ Ibid., 56.

⁴⁴ Jeff Chang, *We Gon’ Be Alright: Notes on Race and Resegregation* (Macmillan, 2016).

⁴⁵ Jennifer E. Cobbina, *Hands Up, Don’t Shoot: Why the Protests in Ferguson and Baltimore Matter, and How They Changed America* (NYU Press, 2019).

with combatting civil injustice via political mobilization.⁴⁶ These trials demonstrate how these contrasting approaches among Black leading organizations sparked movements around the country to end racial injustice.

Radical political movements were the primary reason that the NAACP distanced themselves from mass protest. The goal for the NAACP, as for the CRC, was to provide evidence that these men were not given a fair trial. The approach to get to wanted outcome for both differed greatly. Legally the NAACP was contesting the societal norms and practices that led to the verdict of the seven men.⁴⁷ The CRC, led by William L. Patterson, set up a legal defense that addressed the historical criminalization of Black people and the injustice of these decisions. Patterson believed that relying solely on the justice system is “a fatal mistake to depend alone upon the justice of the courts-that they had none.”⁴⁸ Patterson believed that the courts and institutions would not buckle without public pressure, and upon the groups entry into the case, many local citizens became disgruntled due to the communist ties the organization had. Notably, the editor of the Martinsville Bulletin, Kay Thompson, believed that the communist CRC did not care about the lives of these men, and that the race relations in Martinsville were always friendly. Thompson asserted that the CRC only intended to stir up dissent and recruit citizens for their organization.⁴⁹ Over the next few months, the NAACP and CRC quarreled over the right to defend the men. The infighting between the groups led to the CRC backing off legally in favor of the NAACP. Although they still fought for the control of the cases, the CRC benefited from the NAACP covering the court costs, as the CRC was not as prominent and had very little resources in comparison. The CRC, despite their failure to represent the men legally,

⁴⁶ Rise, *The Martinsville Seven*, 59.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 62.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 63.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 64.

began to organize and garner publicity for the trials. If the appeals were successful, the CRC would likely receive a boost in membership, while also not bankrupting them if they were not.⁵⁰

The NAACP and CRC in-fighting created problems for funding the cases, as the CRC would not back down, and the NAACP was adamant about keeping their reputation intact. This makes little sense as the goals of the CRC and NAACP were aligned, and local branches of the NAACP were left perplexed that they could not publicize the case with the CRC chapter. Illustrating that the men scheduled for execution could be understood as leverage for leadership of the forthcoming Civil Rights Movement.⁵¹ The cases were going to be difficult to defend, and the NAACP needed all the help they could get, yet they resisted help for control, distinction, and reputation. Unlike other cases the NAACP represented, the seeming guilt of the defendants made the violation of the Fourteenth Amendment's due process clause a difficult path to freedom. This was unfortunately the route they took in an, albeit innovative, effort to undermine the racial southern legal system and reveal the injustice of the death penalty.⁵² Enlisting the legal help of Oliver Hill, Spottswood W. Robinson III, and Martin A. Martin, along with three lawyers from the Virginia State Conference, Samuel W. Tucker, Ronald Ealey, and Jerry Williams the NAACP surrounded the case with a plethora of knowledgeable, enthusiastic, and differing legal ideologies.⁵³ These differences could easily derail the appeals, but these men faced thousands of pages to read and had little time to do anything but ensure the Martinsville Seven did not receive the death penalty. Facing a time crunch, as the executions were a month away, many within the organization criticized the extreme pace of the trials and sentencing. The swift trials and death

⁵⁰ Ibid., 66-7.

⁵¹ Ibid., 69.

⁵² Ibid., 70.

⁵³ Ibid., 71-3.

penalty was reserved for Black people and gave a clear illustration of white supremacy.⁵⁴ The examples of white men accused of similar crimes with far less harsher sentences began to flood the airwaves and newspapers. These articles and comments presented a distinct concern for equal justice for Black people in the South.⁵⁵

Governor William Tuck of Virginia received countless telegrams about the Martinsville Seven, many supporting the sentences and demonstrating a disdain for Black folks locally. Tuck, under immense pressure from the locals and his poor track record regarding race relations supporting the common racial sentiments in the South, created growing concern among Black citizens that he would not postpone the executions. However, Martin believed that Tuck, because he sought some sort of legal fairness, would postpone the executions. Martin was correct in his assumption, but Tuck only gave a thirty day stay of execution.⁵⁶ The lawyers throughout these thirty days demonstrated great diligence in the fight for the lives of the seven. This diligence also operates as a demonstration of the peril Black men face when accused of any crime in the South. The lawyers had to work fast, hard, and exhaust all resources so that maybe a Black man would not lose his life, although this is not guaranteed. Short on time, funds, and representation, a trial and sentence executed swiftly exhibits how little the judicial system cares about the lives of Black people around the country. Even more concerning is that this case has been seemingly left in the past when new examples arise every day. Take Breonna Taylor who was shot dead in her apartment in 2020, and later falsely accused of being associated with a drug dealer. Taylor has

⁵⁴ Ibid., 74-5.

⁵⁵ Ibid., 75.

⁵⁶ Ibid., 76-7.

still received no true justice for her murder.⁵⁷ The only officer charged received no charges for murder, continuing the precedent of prolonged injustice for Black people in the U.S.⁵⁸

Precedents set by the Martinsville Seven reverberate in my community and communities around the country, regardless of the acknowledgement of them by the press or citizens. Often, I am unaware of how local laws impact citizens, but I guarantee those that are affected are aware of these problems. This is also revealed when upon asking Governor Tuck for ninety days to appeal on July 5th, 1949, they were only given thirty. The Martinsville Seven, even with top notch legal help could not overcome the vindictiveness and racism of the white southern legal system. In August of the same year, Martin met with Tuck again asking for a few more weeks and was given until September 16 and 23 to exhaust all legal remedies.⁵⁹ Upon receiving more time, Lester Banks of the Virginia State Conference organized fundraisers for the men due to the extremely high legal costs of the trials. Incentivizing church donations, Banks sought to raise \$100,000 but only raised around \$1,000 from almost fifty congregations across Virginia. This raised major questions about the problems with the organization of the NAACP and local branches involvement with community activism. Without the ability to coordinate and little interest in local policies many branches did not contribute because of the lack of organization and clear goals set in that community.⁶⁰ With little financial support, the lawyers submitted their appeal on August 26, 1949, arguing their clients' right of due process had been violated. They challenged the denial of a change of venue, the swiftness of the trials, the admission of

⁵⁷ Amina Elahi, "Attempt To Link Breonna Taylor To Alleged Drug Trafficking A Source Of Controversy," *All Things Considered* (NPR, September 4, 2020), <https://www.npr.org/2020/09/04/909793704/attempt-to-link-breonna-taylor-to-alleged-drug-trafficking-a-source-of-controver>.

⁵⁸ Rachel Treisman, Braktkton Booker, and Vanessa Romo, "Kentucky Grand Jury Indicts 1 of 3 Officers in Breonna Taylor Case," *NPR*, September 23, 2020, <https://www.npr.org/sections/live-updates-protests-for-racial-justice/2020/09/23/914250463/breonna-taylor-charging-decision-to-be-announced-this-afternoon-lawyer-says>.

⁵⁹ Rise, *The Martinsville Seven*, 77-8

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 79-80.

confessions to evidence before the clients had access to counsel, and the severity of the sentences.⁶¹ The Supreme Court ruled that the executions would be stayed until the appeals were completed, scheduling the cases to be heard in January. Once the trials began the attorneys presented their arguments demonstrating “in short, the Martinsville Court had denied the defendants due process with practices that ‘railroaded [the defendants] to the electric chair in assembly line procedure.’”⁶² The legal team tactfully argued that since the death penalty had been introduced in 1847 the goal was to execute Black men, especially after the Civil War. Virginia’s attorney general J. Lindsay Almond led the prosecution, arguing that the men received a fair trial in Martinsville, and the confessions were up to the jurors to decide rather than the court itself. Almond’s concluding statements emphasized that the men received a fair trial and just punishment for the severity crime.⁶³ Chief Justice Hudgins delivered a unanimous decision affirming the convictions. Thus, solidifying the paternalistic racist white supremacist views at all levels of the justice system. The CRC voiced its displeasure of the failure of the legal system, asserting that the same courts that upheld poll taxes would not rule in favor of Black men. Protests, according to Patterson, were the only way to save these men from the electric chair.⁶⁴ The legal team submitted an appeal to the Supreme Court in June, which was denied.⁶⁵

The courts adhered to judicial restraint, upholding the current social order and racist policies. In Virginia between 1900-1949, “nearly 83 percent of the forty-six black men executed for rape during that period did not appeal their convictions, indicating that black defendants had difficulty even gaining access to the appellate courts.”⁶⁶ Much like the case of Breonna Taylor in

⁶¹ Ibid., 81.

⁶² Ibid., 84.

⁶³ Ibid., 85-7.

⁶⁴ Ibid., 88-90.

⁶⁵ Ibid., 88-92.

⁶⁶ Ibid., 93.

2020, the courts then are inclined to preserve a white social and racial order by denying that racial discrimination and unfair procedures existed. Understanding that preserving local order, as opposed to individual rights, was the task of the courts, Martin set his efforts on challenging the constitutionality of the death penalty itself.⁶⁷ Seeking a discrimination remedy, the CRC sought to join with the NAACP providing mass social mobilization against the sentences. The NAACP disregarded the CRC's efforts and made it clear they would only be pursuing justice through the judicial system.⁶⁸ An ironic yet expected path, the NAACP aimed to save the lives of men from a system that cared very little about the fates of Black men. By not allowing the CRC to participate, it is clear the NAACP wanted to distance themselves from any sort of perceived "radical" interests, even when it was in the best interest for the lives of those they were defending.

As Martin and the legal team began drafting a legal brief to submit another appeal, they came across startling statistics that demonstrated clear discrimination of sentences for Black men. In thirteen southern states, 93% of men between the years 1938 and 1948 executed for rape in the South were Black. Horrifically in Virginia "since at least 1908, when the state took over executions from local jurisdictions, forty-five black men had been executed for rape in Virginia while no white man ever suffered a similar penalty for that crime."⁶⁹ Upon these discoveries, Martin petitioned to the new Governor, John S. Battle, that the sentences be commuted because of their harshness. Battle agreed to meet with Martin after July 4, 1950, suspending the executions once again. Around this time, the CRC launched campaigns and protests around the country to put pressure on the governor, but they did so via victim shaming, calling Floyd a liar

⁶⁷ Ibid., 94.

⁶⁸ Ibid., 100.

⁶⁹ Ibid., 102

which angered NAACP leaders. Ironically, using patriarchal victim shaming tactics, the CRC went against their own promotion of women's rights.⁷⁰ These tactics worked, as the governor's office received many letters from the influence of the CRC, while others prompted the governor to commute the sentences because the death penalty was barbaric and against Christian teachings. Other letters emphasized the racism involved with the sentences, as one noted that no white man had been sentenced to death for the same crime, and when two white Richmond police officers raped a Black woman, they only received seven years in jail.⁷¹ Once more, Black women are also treated inhumanely, pushed aside, and given no justice for the crimes committed against them.

Battle a staunch conservative with some progressive leanings, deferred to ruling of the courts despite the large turnout at the hearings for the men. On July 24, 1950, Battle denied the men clemency, citing evidence of the rape, due process, and the ruling of the courts, which consisted of all-white juries.⁷² Battle wanted no controversy, especially early in his term as governor. White elitism won out over the lives of Black men who had harshly sentenced to death, a continuation of racist historical patterns. Prompting Martin and the other to hastily find another legal avenue, as the executions were scheduled for July 28, only days after Battle's ruling. The CRC tried persuading then President Truman to grant clemency for the men. These efforts, however, did not acknowledge the limited executive power regarding state processes and saw their request fall on deaf ears.⁷³ Attempting one more appeal, despite pressure from the CRC, Martin petitioned for a writ of habeas corpus, indicating that the men had been denied

⁷⁰ Ibid., 103-4.

⁷¹ Ibid., 105.

⁷² Ibid., 111.

⁷³ Ibid., 112-3.

equal protection offered by the Fourteenth Amendment.⁷⁴ The writ was granted on July 26, 1950, staying the executions until September. Despite the low morale that they would succeed, Martin persisted in his efforts to save these men. Martin knew the success of an equal protection case as opposed to a due process case under the Fourteenth Amendment was extremely low. Martin also knew, however, that he could continue to appeal the case delaying the executions for as long as two years.⁷⁵ This could buy them much needed time to gain support from around the country and prolong the lives of the men, but it would also drain the little funds they had available quickly. The NAACP was now working to attack the ‘separate but equal’ doctrine to gain equality in the eyes of the law for all people of color.⁷⁶

On the last day of September, Martin, Samuel Tucker, and Attorney General Almond presented oral arguments. Martin and Tucker provided the high rate of Black executions for the crime of rape in comparison to the stats that no white man was executed for the same crime. The most convincing argument that capital punishment was reserved for Blacks as opposed to whites. Statistically “almost twice as many blacks as whites were sentenced to life imprisonment further indicated that heavier punishments were reserved for black defendants.”⁷⁷ Almond responded that the crime committed by the men was so heinous that the sentence was justified regardless of their color. In a stern rebuttal, Tucker argued “when Negroes commit the crime of rape upon white women it is more heinous and dastardly than when white persons commit the same crime upon either white or colored women.”⁷⁸ On October 5, 1950 after hearing the arguments, Judge M. Ray Doubles denied the petition on the basis there was no evidence of discrimination, and the

⁷⁴ Ibid., 113.

⁷⁵ Ibid., 117.

⁷⁶ Ibid., 117.

⁷⁷ Ibid., 120.

⁷⁸ Ibid., 123.

death sentence could be lawfully assigned to the men.⁷⁹ On October 19, Martin filed a petition for a writ of error, rescheduling the executions until November 17 and November 20. At the hearing, Chief Justice Hudgins denied the petition arguing that the brutality of the crime warranted the punishment. The court argued that if they gave equal protection to Blacks, they would have to do the same for whites, thus ending the death penalty.⁸⁰ Although the strangest argument came from Justice Eggleston, who argued that if the evidence were accepted “no negroes could be executed unless a certain number of white people were killed as well.”⁸¹ This argumentation is similar to current Black Lives Matter detractors who protest the movement by stating “all lives matter,” missing the legitimacy of the movement that Black people in the U.S. have been historically oppressed. It is not that whites do not suffer from injustices, but that Black people experience the problems of poverty, police brutality, lack of education, poor housing at higher levels and often receive no relief.⁸² The historical pattern does not pay homage to punishing whites more, but rather to stop punishing Blacks more severely for the same crimes committed by whites. Criminally, in Virginia, rape had not merited an execution unless the defendant in question was Black.

After the decision, Martin immediately appealed to the United States Supreme Court for a writ of certiorari. The CRC upon hearing the rulings pushed for a mass protest using the stats of execution for rape from 1938 to 1948. A week later, in Martinsville, tensions continued to rise when a white service station owner was released on bail after he sexually assaulted a Black

⁷⁹ Ibid., 123.

⁸⁰ Ibid., 125.

⁸¹ Ibid., 125.

⁸² James C. Klotter, “The Black South and White Appalachia,” in *Blacks in Appalachia*, ed. William H. Turner and Edward J. Cabbell (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1985), 51–67. William H. Turner, “The Demography of Black Appalachia: Past and Present,” in *Blacks in Appalachia*, ed. William H. Turner and Edward J. Cabbell (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 1985), 237–61.

woman. Similarly, in Wight County, Virginia, a white mill worker was acquitted by an all-white jury for the sexual assault of a sixteen-year-old black girl, providing more outrage from both whites and Blacks of the legal double standard in Virginia.⁸³ News of this spread rapidly across the east coast and into midwestern cities like Chicago. These events created an outpour of support for the Martinsville Seven across the country, with large sums of money being raised via protest. This support was led by a witness of the events in Martinsville, Josephine Grayson.⁸⁴ Unsurprisingly, the NAACP distanced themselves from these efforts fearing the rhetoric of the CRC would hurt the small chance the men had of gaining clemency for their crimes.⁸⁵ This could have been avoided had the NAACP agreed to work with the CRC from the beginning. It would have allowed the NAACP to closely monitor the actions of the CRC while also gaining more support around the country. Unfortunately, the NAACP was steadfast in the decision to defend the men alone without help and support from local groups and organizations. Something the strategy of the CRC would have helped remedy. It was apparent the ties to socialist policies, along with the implication that the NAACP wanted to retain its place as the primary Black civil rights group, led to a pushback against the CRC.

Meeting with Governor Battle once again, Martin informed Battle that he could not petition the executions because of delays in the attorney general's office. On November 10, 1950, Battle granted the men a final seventy-five day stay on the execution to get the petition to the Supreme Court. On December 29, 1950, the justices met to discuss the writ, denying it on the similar tenet that "if the petitioners were to have any relief, then 'all negroes given the death penalty in Virginia for a rape of a white woman will be entitled to a reversal until enough white

⁸³ Rise, *The Martinsville Seven*, 126.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 126-7

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 127.

men are executed to bring the figures into balance.”⁸⁶ Citing lack of discrimination, despite the all-white juries, the courts turned away the legal attempts of the NAACP. Martin, Tucker, Robinson, and Hill had failed despite the evidence they had amassed presenting the discrepancy and harshness of the sentences against Black men. The courts worked to maintain social order and did so by legally confining these men to their fate. The only way these appeals would succeed is if the “courts were willing to consider empirical, historical, and other extralegal methods of proof...evidence that the attorneys produced to support their allegations appealed mainly to jurists who wanted to accomplish social reform through legal means,” something none of the Courts wanted to assume.⁸⁷ Working against social reform, the Virginia courts and the Supreme Court made it clear that they wanted to maintain the current social control and community order. Both noting the only mechanism of relief was to suspend executions for Blacks until more whites had been executed. There was no dissent of the decisions within the justice system, as that was left to those protesting the decisions in the streets. Assuredly, the courts sent these men to death, not necessarily for their crimes, but because the social order saw it necessary to do so. In sum, the history of Black oppression existed via slavery, the prison-industrial complex, commercial interests, white societal norms, and now a color-blind legal doctrine. The material nature of race is a part of U.S. legal codes that ensures these histories remain untold, under analyzed, and a part of the status quo.

Following a current example, Brock Turner, a twenty-year-old white Stanford University student, raped an unconscious woman at a frat party. Like the events in Martinsville, Turner was young and intoxicated. Dissimilar to the events, the woman was unconscious and unable to

⁸⁶ Ibid., 130.

⁸⁷ Ibid., 130.

consent or fight back as he raped her. Why was this not described as a despicable event in court? The main difference in the case is that Turner was sentenced to six months in jail, with the possibility of serving only three months. Similar pleas were made to the court that he was young and intoxicated and did not deserve a harsh sentence. Why were these pleas accepted? Judge Aaron Persky made his decision based on the athletic potential he saw in Turner, noting prison would have an adverse impact on his future.⁸⁸ Comparing Turner to another college athlete, Cory Batey, the double standard that sentenced the Martinsville Seven to death continues to play out in our society today. Batey, a Black football player for Vanderbilt, was accused and convicted of raping an unconscious woman. The difference between the two is that Batey was sentenced to a minimum of fifteen to twenty-five years in prison.⁸⁹ Thus, the Martinsville Seven serves as a political, social, and historical example of what happens to Black men and women when convicted of a crime. If anything, the Martinsville Seven serves as a template for modern American judicial decisions to ensure a white status quo. These cases serve as an example of courts upholding white supremacist ideology that depict Black men as a criminal, rapist, or in Darren Wilson's thoughts moments before the murder of Michael Brown, "a demon."⁹⁰

Returning to Martinsville, the dates for the executions drew closer and grants for clemency from Governor Battle were met with inaction due to the CRC, and the societal fear of communist movements. Regardless, the CRC continued to fight for clemency, organizing mass

⁸⁸ Marina Koren, "Why the Stanford Judge Gave Brock Turner Six Months," *The Atlantic*, June 17, 2016, <https://www.theatlantic.com/news/archive/2016/06/stanford-rape-case-judge/487415/>.

⁸⁹ Shaun King, "KING: Brock Turner and Cory Batey, Two College Athletes Who Raped Unconscious Women, Show How Race and Privilege Affect Sentences," *New York Daily News*, June 07, 2016. <https://www.nydailynews.com/news/national/king-brock-turner-cory-batey-show-race-affects-sentencing-article-1.2664945>.

⁹⁰ Department of Justice, "DEPARTMENT OF JUSTICE REPORT REGARDING THE CRIMINAL INVESTIGATION INTO THE SHOOTING DEATH OF MICHAEL BROWN BY FERGUSON, MISSOURI POLICE OFFICER DARREN WILSON", March 4, 2015, 14.

protests and candlelight vigils in Richmond, Virginia hoping to persuade Battle to spare the lives of the seven men. Convincing many conservative observers who were extremely skeptical of the leftist organization was an unlikely task, as was convincing a similarly skeptical governor that wanted little controversy early in his first term. On January 30, 1951, William Patterson, and four-hundred delegates from across fifteen states, including Michigan, New York, Illinois, Louisiana, Massachusetts, Pennsylvania, and most chapters of the CRC east of Mississippi, sought to appeal to Governor Battle for clemency. Battle, growing tired of these pleas, refused to intervene, noting that the men were guilty of their crimes and worthy of their punishment.⁹¹ Continuing to fight for the Martinsville Seven, despite these remarks, the CRC continued to hold candlelight vigils for the men in Richmond, Virginia, while Martin and the NAACP lawyers met with Chief Justice Fred Vinson in his hotel room to secure a stay of execution. Vinson denied the request because the Supreme Court had refused to hear it twice already.⁹² All legal options exhausted, the men had to accept the unjust sentences given to them. On February 2, 1951, Joe Henry Hampton, Howard Lee Hairston, Booker T. Millner, and Frank Hairston, Jr., said goodbye to their families, sang hymns, prayed, and spoke to Christian ministers until they were led to the electrocution chair. Despite the efforts and pleas of the NAACP, CRC, thousands of protestors, and several international groups, the executions were carried out. Likewise, on February 5, 1951, the remaining three men, John Clabon Taylor, James Luther Hairston, and Francis DeSales Grayson, said goodbye to their families and waited in their cells until they were executed. Upon hearing the news of the executions, demonstrators outside the Capitol dispersed.⁹³ Later on in his

⁹¹ Rise, *The Martinsville Seven*, 134-9.

⁹² *Ibid.*, 140-4.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, 145-8.

life, Governor Battle admitted that at least two of the men deserved clemency, but he recalled that he did not lose any sleep over the executions.⁹⁴

Today, the Martinsville Seven continues to have an impact on American politics, whether the case itself is of primary focus or not. Precedents set by the case carry forward to today, as the CRC and NAACP continued to fight to end the racial disparity in capital sentencing culminating in the Supreme Court case *Coker v. Georgia* (1977). The decision in *Coker v. Georgia* ruled the death penalty for rape was unconstitutional. Unsurprisingly, the opinion of Justice Byron White did not mention race, rather it focused on the injustice of a death sentence for a crime that did not take a life.⁹⁵ Following these cases, the institution of the war on drugs in the 1980s and clear attack on Black communities, sought to imprison and diminish the value of Black life.⁹⁶ With the enactment of a thirty million dollar crime bill in 1994, most of which enabled militarized police and a profit driven prison system. Missing from this bill was the Racial Justice Act, which would have allowed the use of statistical evidence that could prove certain criminal sentences were institutionalized patterns of racial discrimination and given Black people more of a chance. The Racial Justice Act was not included because many Black leaders were desperate for the funds in their communities, and saw this act as an impediment towards receiving, in their belief, much needed economic relief. Once again, law makers sought to ensure that white supremacist institutions were reinforced.⁹⁷ What does the Martinsville Seven accomplish, if only an example of past and current racist legal processes? Throughout, the case represents a forgotten, fractured history that must be reckoned with to progress as a society, and perhaps achieve solidarity. As a child who grew up in Martinsville, I was never taught the problems of racial discrimination and

⁹⁴ Ibid., 144.

⁹⁵ Ibid., 159.

⁹⁶ Michelle Alexander, *The New Jim Crow* (New York: The New Press, 2012), 51-6.

⁹⁷ Ibid., 72-8. Rise, *The Martinsville Seven*, 160-1.

injustice that Blacks faced compared to whites. It was not discussed in personal conversations, an omitted fact of our community, and those wounds cannot heal unless acknowledged.

Recognizing the full history of oppression and racist patterns that exist is a promising step towards unity and solidarity within the community. The Black Lives Matter movement has only solidified my belief that until people are willing to recognize this history, the current trends of white supremacy, and admit that Black Lives Matter, we cannot work towards a solution. How then can we achieve this? What can be done? Arguing for music, musical democracy and historical awareness can work together to provide solidarity movements throughout Appalachia. Presenting the echoes of early banjo players, illustrating the progress of initiatives that support Black interests, and providing an archive to recognize these issues is a steppingstone to a new era of Appalachia. It is time to listen to those who have never had a voice and work to ensure these echoes in the holler' reverberate throughout the country.

Space and Place in a Musical Democracy: The Changing Same

But here is a theory stated just before. That what will come will be a Unity Music. The Black Music which is jazz and blues, religious and secular. Which is New Thing and Rhythm and Blues. The consciousness of social reevaluation and rise, a social spiritualism. – Amiri Baraka, “The Changing Same”, 210.

Working on a frigid night in 2014, at a food court on Virginia Tech's campus, I overheard chanting outside the windows. The chanting was for the killing of Michael Brown, which at the time I had no strong opinions about. All I knew was that he was shot in killed by a police officer, and for the most part those around me never gave it any attention. Some said it was justified (later a professor would tell me this as well), but I cannot recall a differing opinion or a strong

opinion among my friends. As a few of my co-workers were huddled closely to frigid windows, I overheard conversations that dismissed the protests as “pointless.” I finished my shift and eventually returning home late that night. These chants and discussions of race and power stuck with me. Not knowing why, I searched Google looking for anything regarding the shooting, the officer, the events, anything that would suffice this quick obsession I had. Relying on several conservative posts, and likely Fox News, I concluded that Michael Brown may not have deserved to die, but he should not have stolen those cigarillos and charged Wilson. Had I known the quotidian struggle that members of the Black community face at the hands of law enforcement and judicial institutions, my outlook would be different. Given the history and demographics of Martinsville, I should be far more understanding of these problems. As a white kid from a small town in the foothills of the Appalachian Mountains, I never had to worry about the police, or concern myself with those that did. Ignorant of these burdens, I naively thought racism was a relic of the past, after all that is what I was taught. Rarely hearing anything contrary to my opinion, I grew up with the privileged idea that everyone had an equal shot at attaining their goals and future success. A failure of these goals and success, in my view, was based on their choices, rather than perpetual inequality and oppression.

With all these experiences fresh in my mind, my roommate at the time shared the rap album “good kid m.A.A.d city” with me. It was 2013-2014 at the time, and rap was not something I listened to frequently. Hip hop was somewhat foreign to me, and usually I only listened to it with friends and never thought much of it. I grew up listening to mostly country music, pop, rock, and occasionally worked in mainstream rappers like Lil Wayne, T.I., and 50 Cent. Hip hop or rap was not popular in my family, and it was never played in our house or on long car rides. When I put on my headphones to listen to this album, the music started and I

became mystified with the beats, presentation, and the opening prayer that I immediately identified with. The haunting tones send chills up my spine to this day. I was hooked. The album ramped up with a discussion of issues regarding police brutality, poverty, women, drugs, and a community that was in turmoil. It also had moments of anxiety and tranquility that many feel in adolescence. I could not directly relate to driving around avoiding police, but I somehow felt it. Reconsidering many of my previous positions, I started having conversations about race and class in the U.S. Meeting with Dr. Brandy Faulkner frequently, I remember asking what was going on and why it mattered. Without hesitation she calmly explained to me the problems of racial injustice in our country. I still had not grasped it, and I never would, but starting to understand my own place within this narrative would not be possible without that album. Reading and writing on the subject, with the guidance of great mentors like Dr. Faulkner, shaped my thinking throughout my academic career. Music, specifically hip hop, put me in a position that allows me to think about the world more critically. Music allowed me to talk about issues of race and class, and hip hop provided avenues of exploration into other genres, cultures, and lived experiences. Reminiscing about my upbringing, and the country and bluegrass songs I grew up listening to, revealed similar struggles and narratives of resistance. Raising the questions, how can hip hop and bluegrass help bring change, if at all, to Martinsville, Virginia? How can people be brought together by music, given the history of oppression? What does a solidarity movement look like in Martinsville? Answering these questions is not a goal of the project, but it does lead to fruitful discussions of what must change. I attempt to provide such a discussion with an examination of what Nancy Love calls ‘musical democracy.’

Love understands music as a rhetoric, using many tenants associated with philosophy and poetry to address social, political, and economic matters. Music can critically address social

problems with a stern voice, while providing rhythm, expression, and freedom. Focusing more on societies creation of meanings, a la Stuart Hall, Love focuses “on how rhetoric links cultural expression with political action by constructing interpretive communities” allowing for singular and collective identities to manifest, reproducing politics, and creating ‘symbolic protest.’⁹⁸

Locally, this form of symbolic protest can occur through an understanding of home and place.

Doreen Massey’s work, *Space, Place, and Gender* provides key understandings of the complex interactions of place, identity, and home. Place, as Massey understands it, is our home, our histories, geography, time, and the places we live and return to make up the spatial, or all our interactions in a national or global scale.⁹⁹ Henri Lefebvre remarks that understandings of space was originally rendered by mathematicians as a precise function to solve equations, but never used to grasp our physical and social realities. Space, Lefebvre indicates, is a ‘problem of knowledge,’ it is the quotidian, the social, and political, having many variations, but never absolute or true.¹⁰⁰ Space is all around us, an ungraspable concept, that is best understood as a social product. The spaces, and centrally, places where we exist are governed and given worth through social productions of meaning. Much of the literature regarding space and place focuses primarily on the role of capitalism and the production of social relations within capitalism.¹⁰¹

Important to this work, theories of space and place provide a pivotal understanding of how social and political actions work at local levels, or places. Using these theorizations, places like Martinsville are situated in social spaces in the U.S. and globally. The places people inhabit are a collective of different experiences, histories, races, classes, ethnicities, genders, and religions,

⁹⁸ Nancy Sue Love, *Musical Democracy* (New York: State University of New York Press, 2006), 3.

⁹⁹ Doreen Massey, *Space, Place and Gender* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1994), 1-4.

¹⁰⁰ Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space* (New York: Blackwell Publishing, 1991), 2-7.

¹⁰¹ These terms can differ greatly depending on the context of the term. For more on capitalism and social relations see David Harvey, *Spaces of Capital: Towards a Critical Geography* (Routledge, 2001)., David Harvey, *The Condition of Postmodernity: An Enquiry into the Origins of Cultural Change* (Wiley, 1992).

among other things at a certain time. Places, however, are more and more difficult to retain, perhaps impossible under past definitions, due to the speeding up and spreading out of capital. Space and place are continually reproduced “in what Marx once called ‘the annihilation of space by time.’”¹⁰² Drawing on Lefebvre, he indicates that previous thinkers focused primarily on space as opposed to time. By doing so, they focused on how urban planning was an object, defined by its contents in both value and objectivity. This led many scholars to think around the political, placing it as an obstacle rather than an explanation of why certain spaces exist in the manner they do.¹⁰³ Space, however, is not removed from politics, it has always been political, it is strategically planned and consists of the past and present all at once. Space is a product of history and geography, and it has always been shaped in a political way.¹⁰⁴

Place operates within these political and social mechanisms. The social interactions and understandings that exist in the broad production of space also operate within local places. Meaning that space and place are intimately connected because they share interactions and continue to change just as politics and social understandings change. Thus, place is no different than space, it exists as a marker of space with the many dynamic, different, and similar understandings of what place means to people who occupy it. Therefore, place exists within space, but also within certain points of time. Place, for many, operates as a refuge from the constant speed and globalized spatial world people live in. Operating primarily as an understanding of home, place invokes a nostalgia that attempts to combat the fragmentation and disruption caused by the globalization of space via communication technologies.¹⁰⁵ As methods globalization continue to expand, so do corporations which control these technologies, having

¹⁰² Massey, *Space, Place and Gender*, 146.

¹⁰³ Henri Lefebvre, *State, Space, World: Selected Essays* (University of Minnesota Press, 2009), 169-70.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, 170-1.

¹⁰⁵ Massey, *Space, Place and Gender*, 1-10.

unparalleled power to control and influence ideologies and the flow of capital. The music industry is an example of how those who control technology, control ideologies and can enforce them. Home is merely a production of all these social and political interactions, creating more inequality and difference as opposed to the belief of a homogenous area of people that identify in similar ways.¹⁰⁶ The regional areas people identify with are just extensions of the broader social interactions that exist in their country, but also throughout the world. As local businesses ship products to and from places like South Korea, it reshapes our understanding of what local entails. Another example is the news people concern themselves with that is no more local than national or international developments that could affect our daily lives in ways previously unknown.¹⁰⁷ Understandably, this unnerves people in search of a local identity, or a better understanding of their own place in society. To better understand the impact of music, particularly within an understanding of home, is a rethinking of the concept of place. Massey indicates that capital has compressed our social interactions, e.g., communication and movement, across geographical space making capital the primary method of understanding our experience of space. This is, however, not the only way individuals experience space, as there are a multitude of other things such as race, gender, sexual orientation, and religious beliefs that influence our experience of space.¹⁰⁸

Therefore, capital alone does not influence how free an individual is, whether they will be given a harsh sentence in a courtroom, if the police will shoot or not, if they have access to healthcare or education, and where they may end up living. Take for instance that movement for women has historically been restricted, by not only of problems associated with capital but by

¹⁰⁶ Ibid., 157-60.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid., 159-60.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid., 146-7.

the actions of white men.¹⁰⁹ Similarly, Black people have been universally displaced, criminalized, killed, and stripped of humanity by the actions of white supremacist institutions. Capital alone cannot explain why Blacks were left out of the music industry, because as demonstrated throughout, once let into the music industry, Black musicians outsold many if not most of their white counterparts. Would it then make sense to promote and empower Black musicians if capital were the only factor? Alongside capital, the white supremacist ideology is a primary way all humans experience space. Leading to destructive patterns of racial oppression, class antagonism, and imminent violence. Importantly, class is also a way in which space is experienced, as the ruling class separates, crushes, and castrates all opposition towards them.¹¹⁰ Thus, creating power dynamics where certain groups of people control movement and communication, finances, and legal codes. The white elites are the ones who gain influence and power, while limiting the mobility of others.¹¹¹ In this understanding, by providing political affluence and social mobility for some groups of people, it inherently weakens others' political power.¹¹²

What if this changed? Music and its ability to maneuver within time and space, providing avenues for resistance against the dominant forces within spatial politics. Simply hearing music cannot change the mechanisms of political power, but acting on words of resistance, whether it be in the streets of Ferguson, Missouri, Baltimore, Maryland, Los Angeles, California, Harlan County, Kentucky, Selma, Alabama, Southwest Virginia, and hopefully Martinsville, Virginia, can. Place matters, because in these areas and countless others, there are groups of individuals who have witnessed, experienced, and acted on injustice and oppression via music and organized

¹⁰⁹ Ibid., 148.

¹¹⁰ Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, 24-5.

¹¹¹ Massey, *Space, Place, and Gender*, 149-50.

¹¹² Ibid., 150.

protests against oppressive institutions to gain political mobility and justice. As noted, acts of injustice have existed in Appalachia since the region's so called inception. Notably, examples of coal mining companies' degradation of land and resources for profit, colonization of the region by companies via capital and religion, selling of Black slaves down South, and current poverty and healthcare issues unaddressed by government officials.¹¹³

How then do citizens think about place when these issues are so rampant worldwide? What does place offer? Poignantly, Massey illustrates, that while place is understood by critical theorists as "an evasion; as a retreat from the (actually unavoidable) dynamic and change of 'real life,'" place provides an attachment that people do not want to lose, because in many cases the place they call home is all they have.¹¹⁴ Place is where political struggles are orchestrated and where they can be most effective. Local struggles can grow into a regional struggle, a national struggle, and even a global struggle. Notably, Black Lives Matter began as a local hashtag on Twitter after George Zimmerman was acquitted of all charges for the murder of Trayvon Martin in Florida. The local networks in Florida did not want to cover the murder, and much of the context was not presented until a group known as Million Hoodies mobilized and amplified voices via social media calling for people to act.¹¹⁵ The power of local social movements can lead to current social movements like the Black Lives Matter Movement. A movement with a global reach in its goal to end racial injustice for all people of color. Rethinking place requires that some of these more invigorating aspects of home stay attached, such as memories, narratives, and music.

¹¹³ Ronald D. Eller, *Uneven Ground: Appalachia Since 1945* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2008), 232-3.

¹¹⁴ Massey, *Space, Place and Gender*, 150-1.

¹¹⁵ Francis Shor, "'Black Lives Matter' Constructing A New Civil Rights and Black Freedom Movement," *New Politics* XV, no. 3 (Summer 2015).

Places contain many versions of itself within every citizen. There is no one true idea of a place and what it is. For some, Martinsville is just a stopping point in their life, for others it is their forever home, one with roots and memories, both good and bad. The understanding of home and place differs from person to person and considers their own interactions and experiences. I know firsthand many who hated living in Martinsville, while I love the area. The factors that go into this are impossible to name, but of critical importance are those of race, class, and gender. These three factors alone can greatly influence how one experiences a place. My position on Martinsville is likely due to having access to things many did not. I was not questioned about my status, intelligence, or appearance that I am sure others experienced at some point. This illustrates the problem that can arise when individuals describe home and place, they are likely not the same for everyone. Take for example the Pittston Coal Strike in Wise, Virginia, in which women led the protests combatting gendered positions, class divisions, and an ascribed Appalachian identity.¹¹⁶ Women who struggled to be heard led much of the organizing for the coal miners demanding better health care and higher wages. They fought the norms of gendered class constructs through repeated acts of social protests and non-violence. Educating their husbands on workers unions, the women of Wise county led local protests for working-class Appalachians. In many instances the women would sing “Amazing Grace” to quell violent emotions the coal company instigated in an act of unity to address the social, political, economic, and religious transgressions against the people by the Pittston coal company.¹¹⁷ For Appalachian women, it would seem likely that an understanding of place evokes negative gender, class, and race characteristics that are ascribed to them. The Appalachian stereotype of genetic and cultural

¹¹⁶ Virginia Rinaldo Seitz, “Class, Gender, and Resistance in the Appalachian Coalfields,” in *Community Activism and Feminist Politics: Organizing Across Race, Class, and Gender*, ed. Nancy A. Naples (New York: Routledge, 1998), 213–36.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 220-3.

inadequacy, however, was inverted by these women who drew upon their Appalachian ethnicity as a source of pride and unity among the miners.¹¹⁸ Drawing upon the Civil Rights Movement, “The Daughters of Mother Jones,” or the Auxiliary, initiated sit-ins, and civil disobedience against the coal company, and made them notice that women, not men, were leading the charge.¹¹⁹

By leading demonstrations and asserting their status as working-class Appalachians, these women created solidarity and a new “conceptualization of class interests, grounded in women’s lived experience of family and community, emerged only after women in the Auxiliary had an involvement in class politics.”¹²⁰ Despite conflict that did arise among Auxiliary members, the women demonstrated that a non-discriminatory social movement located in Appalachia within particular constructs of race, class, gender, and ethnicity, is not only possible but necessary in the fight against injustice. Using their understanding of place in society and geography, the Auxiliary was able to unite people of all races and classes through similar interests and protests, challenging the stereotypical assumptions of Appalachian identity.¹²¹ Demonstrating that differences of experience do exist among the pivotal categories of race, class, and gender, they also provide new methods of social and political action. Providing avenues of resistance against a coal company with interests outside the community and uniting against racial injustice, lends proof that solidarity movements can unite people through local problems of injustice. These movements and the acknowledgement of place and social, economic, and political positions provides connections across the categories of race, gender, and class.

¹¹⁸ Ibid., 215.

¹¹⁹ Ibid., 222-4.

¹²⁰ Ibid., 229.

¹²¹ Ibid., 230-4.

This extroverted sense of place connects itself to wider arguments found around the world, which connects the local with the global. There must be an understanding that place is not a static concept, it is an ever changing process of social interactions through time and space.¹²² Places are specific social processes, without true boundaries, and are always connected to larger spaces within a globalized capitalist economy. Consequently, this does not mean places do not carry meaning, they do, but it requires a connection to places beyond. It requires “a global sense of the local, a global sense of place.”¹²³ It is the continual production of signs, identity, and social interactions that keep space in flux and in some ways create anxiety of the globalized world. By bounding individuals in a particular place, anxiety and fear culminate in antagonism and narratives of outside division take hold. bell hooks indicates that place for Black folks is riddled with many experiences of pain, division, oppression, and struggle. For hooks, like for many others who fight against social injustice and the racist, classist, sexist, and oppressive institutions, living and resisting “from that space in the margin that is a site of creativity and power, that inclusive space where we recover ourselves” can open new understandings of the world grounded in experience and resistance.¹²⁴

Music can be thought of as a tool that can develop this type of resistance hooks describes in Martinsville. Recalling Nancy Love, music can help social movements in their deployment of identities, differences, and concerns at a local level.¹²⁵ What is needed for places like Martinsville is a communicative approach that privileges over everything else, narratives and experience. This could provide the framework to build policy upon that helps all in that place.

¹²² Massey, *Space, Place and Gender*, 155.

¹²³ *Ibid.*, 156.

¹²⁴ bell hooks, “Choosing the Margin as a Space of Radical Openness,” *Framework: The Journal of Cinema and Media*, no. 36 (1989), 23.

¹²⁵ Love, *Musical Democracy*, 5.

When locals express their concerns through stories, others from that place will likely listen. This is contrary to academic experts who claim to know what is best for the area despite never living there any longer than their research demanded. Within most parts of Appalachia, examples of these types of movements, provide a path for future social movements concerned with addressing injustice and organizing. For example, in Cincinnati, Ohio local groups organized to help impoverished white and Black youth in the city receive access to education, clothes, healthcare, and food. Attacking the stereotypes of Appalachian identity as poor, uneducated, and simultaneously distancing and problematizing stereotypes of Appalachian homogeneity, the Urban Appalachian Council focused on a shared heritage approach. This approach connected the people in the region through their neighborhoods, churches, and other intersecting networks Blacks and whites shared.¹²⁶ By focusing on the similarities between race and class, as opposed to the perceived differences, they were able to organize a large portion of their community. In fact, surveys, and census data since 1970 “show that many white Appalachian residents have job statuses, average incomes, and educational attainment levels much closer to those of African Americans than those of non-Appalachian white residents.”¹²⁷ Within much of Appalachia, the pathway towards a social movement that involves all people is within grasp, it just takes strategic planning as demonstrated by the Urban Appalachian Council. As illustrated, those living in the region, regardless of race or class, usually have more in common than those outside the region. It is a product of local symbolic protest that challenges dominant conceptions of Appalachians, bringing in voices of all citizens that can create a truly legitimate democratic discourse.¹²⁸ In

¹²⁶ Philip J. Obermiller et al., “Identity Matters: Building an Urban Appalachian Movement in Cincinnati,” in *Transforming Places: Lessons From Appalachia*, ed. Stephen L. Fisher and Barbara Ellen Smith (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2012), 64.

¹²⁷ *Ibid.*, 65.

¹²⁸ Love, *Musical Democracy*, 11.

other words, for a social movement to work at this level, particularly one emphasizing music, there must be inclusivity of all styles of communication. Appalachia is a place that historically pushes back against the ills of modernization and globalization. It is home to so many and yet it is continually attacked and divided by corporate interests.

As noted, there have always been protests in the region for social justice, however, many have been short-lived single issue protests that usually fade after a resolution. What is needed are social movements in line with organizations such as Virginia Organizing and Appalshop, that have goals beyond Appalachia and provide places for discussion of regional identity and activism.¹²⁹ Throughout the twentieth century, there has never been an overarching Appalachian social movement, mainly due to the specific needs of each community in the region. Making solidarity across the mountains strenuous and difficult. With issues ranging from mountaintop removal coal mining, racial injustice, widespread poverty, limited access to health care, class-based antagonisms, right-wing reactionary politics, corporate neoliberalism, sexism, drug addiction, and many other societal problems, organizing becomes extremely difficult.¹³⁰ Coal mining is an important concern for many citizens in Appalachia, but the struggles do not begin and end with coal. Many others suffer from different forms of discrimination, oppression, and corporate driven globalization not associated with coal.¹³¹

Notably, the important questions concerning solidarity in Appalachia regard coalition building.

This ferment raises crucial questions about building coalitions and movements with sufficient traction to challenge the dominance of neoliberalism and corporate driven globalization. How can activists most effectively counter the market abandonment of entire places and peoples-including

¹²⁹ Stephen L. Fisher and Barbara Ellen Smith, *Transforming Places: Lessons from Appalachia* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2012), 2-3.

¹³⁰ *Ibid.*, 4-6.

¹³¹ *Ibid.*, 5.

their needs for living wage jobs, quality health care, and sustainable communities- in the face of global economic upheaval and migration? ...How, in this post - 9/11 security state where defense of the embattled nation sometimes takes form as white Christian xenophobia, can we build sturdy coalitions and movements that bridge across race, place, religion, gender, class, national origin, and sexual identity?¹³²

This passage reflects the many troubles that exist within Appalachia, but as noted, the problems faced in this region are like problems that exist in other ‘invisible’ communities. While one approach cannot necessarily solve or provide answers to the questions of place based social movements, music can and does provide a voice that presents insider stories and narratives that have been erased over time.

Love indicates that “voice as music” provides more inclusive democratic deliberation, as music can blur and cross relationships and identities, challenging established institutions that oppress.¹³³ She argues that music is not an essentialist concept, as it has many sounds and interpretations, bridging difference through continual experimentation and lacking any real quality of essentialism.¹³⁴ Music furthers our understanding of democracy by providing voice that is otherwise unavailable. For Love, music can release new energies via social movements, and it can provide untold stories and histories that can unite people through a recognition of race and class oppression.¹³⁵ Therefore, music can be a tool that defines an individual’s relationship to the local everyday occurrences, as well the global. It is the polyvocal voices and messaging that communicate like circumstance or give meaning to some of their interactions through lyrics and rhythm.¹³⁶ Music is a method of creating a place. It bonds displaced peoples and can provide unity across communities locally, nationally, and internationally. Importantly, Rohan Kalyan

¹³² Ibid., 7.

¹³³ Love, *Musical Democracy*, 11.

¹³⁴ Ibid., 12.

¹³⁵ Ibid., 13-14.

¹³⁶ Sheila Whiteley, Andy Bennett, and Stan Hawkins, *Music, Space and Place: Popular Music and Cultural Identity* (Burlington: Ashgate, 2004), 2.

presents the case of Bolivian artists using hip hop as a method of protest to sing to the problems that persist in their community.¹³⁷ Using this approach in Appalachia, prominent Bluegrass artist Tyler Childers' most recent album *Long Violent History*, attempts to connect issues of racism to his hometown. Childers released a video on YouTube that addresses this intention of the album. Childers presents that his album is a sonic soundscape that he intended to be an old style fiddle album that discusses the struggles of white rural America and the continued oppression of African Americans. His album raises questions paramount to racial injustice in rural settings. Childers achieves this when he places white listeners in the lives of Black victims of police brutality.¹³⁸ He pleads that his listeners understand and demand justice for systemic problems of police brutality, love one another, and fight back against continued racism.

In the titular song of Childers' album, Childers addresses his audience, primarily white bluegrass fans, to acknowledge and speak out against the historical violent oppression Blacks face every day. His verse, "How many boys could they haul off this mountain/ Shoot full of holes, cuffed and laying in the streets / 'Til we come into town in a stark raving anger/ Looking for answers and armed to the teeth," gives a clear depiction of the long violent history whites have not had to endure.¹³⁹ Childers track seems to push for awareness and love, as opposed to hatred of those that often suffer terrible fates because of the color of their skin. He does this by providing a clear analogy of what would happen if those listening saw people they know shot in the street. He indicates that they too would fight back against these injustices, so why not join those that are suffering from endless violence rather than be opposed to a social movement

¹³⁷ Rohan Kalyan, "Hip-hop Imaginaries: A Genealogy of the Present," *Journal for Cultural Research* 10, no. 3 (July 2006): 237–57, <https://doi.org/10.1080/14797580600848070>.

¹³⁸ ChilledCow, *A Message from Tyler.*, 2020, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QQ3_AJ5Ysx0.

¹³⁹ Tyler Childers, "Long Violent History," track #9 on *Long Violent History*, Hickman Holler, 2020, YouTube Music.

calling for justice that they should support. The long violent history outlined in this and previous chapters, is something that Black people in this country constantly encounter. Childers' remarkable album presents one of the clearer depictions of Appalachian musical resistance towards Black oppression, relaying anti-racist messaging through a prominent modality in the region.¹⁴⁰ He provides a clear acknowledgement of the quotidian oppression Blacks face in the name of white supremacist violence, as well as the need to resist and change it. Through an identifiable music source and a historical understanding of the role the music industry has in organizing and segregating genres, Childers album attacks societal racial problems within Appalachia and the U.S., emphasizing the connection between place and space.

Space then is not a thing, it is a series of interactions, a container of things of which spaces are produced, bound up in interactions and production.¹⁴¹ Music operates within a space that is simultaneously connected to other spaces such as the economy of states and world markets, marking the connection between multiple social spaces and global markets. As Lefebvre indicates "we are not confronted by one social space but by many," and the local spaces we acknowledge as home are not abolished by the global.¹⁴² Instead they exist together with interweaving markets, laws, and networks. They impenate one another, creating places both urban and rural, local, and global. Thus, social space is hypercomplex and embraces many entities, conflicts, and the continual reemergence of these things in our everyday lives.¹⁴³ Space and place are thus continually reproduced and connected within one another. By writing an album specifically catered to local and regional interests, Childers is simultaneously pushing

¹⁴⁰ Sheila Whiteley, Andy Bennett, and Stan Hawkins, *Music, Space and Place: Popular Music and Cultural Identity*, 5.

¹⁴¹ Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space* (Hoboken: Blackwell Publishing, 1991), 82-5.

¹⁴² *Ibid.*, 86.

¹⁴³ *Ibid.*, 87-90.

back at dominant political spaces, the segregated music markets discussed in chapter two, and presenting the erased local history of racial oppression like the Martinsville Seven. Simply put, music at a local level can provide forms of resistance against global modes of oppression. Providing a narrative that those listening can relate to can link directly to the banjo echoes discussed throughout. In this project, music has been understood to make a living, exert oneself, be creative, protest dominant racist beliefs and policies, and provide resistance to oppressive structures. This is precisely the point Murray Forman contends when he argues that rap provides a voice for minority youth to make sense of the places in which they live.¹⁴⁴

The many sounds we hear, particularly in Martinsville, whether that be country, bluegrass, or hip hop, provide individuals with an understanding of place and their association with it. Musical narratives and rhythms “reveal latent meanings already present in ordinary speech,” in which these artistic creations distinguish new worlds that separate themselves from the problems of the everyday.¹⁴⁵ In this sense, music could be understood as an escape, but it is a functioning. Like social movements, as a participant in “constructing/affirming shared meanings when they “break silence” on an issue, bringing concerns that were private or, at least, privatized, to public discourse,” music provides a functioning voice and political tool.¹⁴⁶ Using Habermas’ understandings of voice and music, Love emphasizes voice as music, in that it moves individuals and “invokes the diverse experiences of democratic citizens,” conveying the differences that can be publicly voiced.¹⁴⁷ These voices exist everywhere but are indefinitely heard within hip hop and bluegrass, as they are in other genres of music. Take for instance the

¹⁴⁴ Murray Forman, *The Hood Comes First: Race, Space, and Place in Rap and Hip-Hop* (Middletown, Conn: Wesleyan University Press, 2002), xviii-xix.

¹⁴⁵ Love, *Musical Democracy*, 19.

¹⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 26.

¹⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 41.

track “The Blacker the Berry” from Kendrick Lamar’s album *To Pimp A Butterfly*. Throughout the song, Kendrick recognizes that no matter what he does he cannot escape the racism that surrounds him and all Black people. Continually criminalized, disenfranchised, beaten, and oppressed, Kendrick’s narrative of racial oppression provides a connection to his own personal thoughts, community, and the larger role of racism in the U.S.¹⁴⁸ This song, indicates that the materiality of race matters, and that space and place is also an influential factor in how structures of racism control. Evidence in other tracks such as Ice Cubes’ “Why we Thugs”, KRS-One’s “Sound of da police”, 2Pac’s “Holler if ya hear me”, as well as his song “Changes”, illustrate the everyday problems Black youth face in the U.S. regarding civilization, police brutality, poverty, and drug addiction. The geographical factors found in these songs matter when discussing race, because they provide local evidence of racism and the practiced enforcement of it. These tracks provide local narratives of the criminalization of the Black population via police brutality. These narratives of truth via the medium of music, are then sold, distributed, and consumed around the world.¹⁴⁹ Hip hop provides links to the local, and as Tricia Rose understands, it works to give power back to those dispossessed of it.¹⁵⁰ The ability to create one’s own narrative is extremely powerful, and hip hop enables this.

Rap provides spaces where stories can be encountered by all people, while also intimately connecting these issues to a place in which listeners can connect to.¹⁵¹ Whether this be through descriptions of violence, love, or hustling in the inner city or a rural area, connections are made because these events are not limited to one place, these injustices can be viewed globally. The

¹⁴⁸ Kendrick Lamar, “The Blacker The Berry,” track #13 on *To Pimp A Butterfly*, Top Dawg Entertainment, 2015, YouTube Music.

¹⁴⁹ Forman, *The Hood Comes First: Race, Space, and Place in Rap and Hip-Hop*, 1-4.

¹⁵⁰ Tricia Rose, *Black Noise: Rap Music and Black Culture in Contemporary America* (Wesleyan University Press, 1994).

¹⁵¹ Forman, *The Hood Comes First: Race, Space, and Place in Rap and Hip-Hop*, 15-30.

‘hood’ and the ‘ghetto’ exist as both unique histories of what hip hop is, and as a marker for place inscribed within rap music.¹⁵² Thus, music is a voice that stretches across space and place, addressing historical narratives that has divided people of all races and classes. When Appalachia’s connection with music is examined, it is often associated with a painful history of slavery and Jim Crow. But the banjos played throughout the region by Black griots continues to connect the region’s current banjo playing generation to those who came before. It is the connection and the narratives between people from music that reckoning with local history provides. Music is and has always been a shared cultural experience that links our political practices, and transforms our relationships in communities, regions, nations, and around the world.¹⁵³

Making these connections, Love, drawing on Rawls, establishes that people need one another for a social movement to make sense. Without multiple people combining efforts and talents there can be no true solidarity.¹⁵⁴ Therefore, together and “through music the nation-state could deepen the aesthetic experience of its citizen-subjects and create a nation of individuals capable of sensing ethical imperatives together.”¹⁵⁵ Rawls and Habermas, however, rely too much on notions of liberalism, rather than a fully realized social movement based on music that challenges the basic tenets of white Western liberalism. ‘Movement music’ for Love challenges these conceptions and “employs the primal, material, and spiritual energies of civil society in the pursuit of justice.”¹⁵⁶ Music does this by blurring boundaries of modern subjectivity, raising consciousness of a politicized civil society, promoting coalitions and unity among multiple

¹⁵² Ibid., 18-20, 342-4.

¹⁵³ Love, *Musical Democracy*, 42.

¹⁵⁴ Ibid., 52.

¹⁵⁵ Ibid., 57.

¹⁵⁶ Ibid., 67.

groups of people, and engaging with audiences to respond to injustices and oppression.¹⁵⁷ Music connects people within places and spaces, and it can provide for truth and justice in society. Recalling Bessie Smith, her voice spoke back against Black oppression in the music industry by becoming the first Black singer over the airwaves. Smith sold thousands of records and paves the way for more Black blues artists to sing the songs they wrote, as opposed to having whites exploit them.

Importantly, music empowered those in Appalachia to compose, record, and extrapolate their grievances, while simultaneously being silenced by outside interests.¹⁵⁸ Deborah Thompson indicates that there is a confused understanding of what Appalachian music and identity is. Henry Shapiro's work goes through great lengths to discuss these inconsistencies and stereotypes of Appalachia, but it is the continual silencing of Appalachian voices that is problematic. Silencing of these voices hides and erases the rich cross cultural history of Appalachia, as it pertains to musical voice and solidarity movements. Amplifying these silenced voices in Martinsville, and Appalachia as a whole, allows for others to join, shaping their future as one of unity instead of division. It is up to activists and scholars "to make noise about the silences in Appalachian music," in order to recognize these dark history and work towards a brighter future.¹⁵⁹ That is why musical voices can reveal untold stories, new truths, and unexplored sites of meaning and resistance that allows for the empowerment of all those left out of history, primarily Blacks.¹⁶⁰ Music does not essentialize identities, instead "the extralinguistic quality of music" disrupts established identities.¹⁶¹ Music crosses borders ,and cannot be confined by a

¹⁵⁷ Ibid., 71.

¹⁵⁸ Deborah J. Thompson, "Searching for Silenced Voices in Appalachian Music," *GeoJournal* 65, no. 1–2 (2006): 67–78.

¹⁵⁹ Ibid., 76.

¹⁶⁰ Love, *Musical Democracy*, 73.

¹⁶¹ Ibid., 75.

single space, as Lefebvre would insist. It provides, instead, flexible definitions of place that can in turn create a coalition, a solidarity movement of many different people. The sharing of experience in Appalachia through music links listeners to one another, whether it be a rap song or a bluegrass tune that discusses similar struggles of oppression and community. Different experiences that exist does not harm communities, it adds to them. Providing more voices in music to speak from the periphery, enables the ability to move forward together in a celebration of these differences and as a condemnation of racism.¹⁶² Tapping into local places with music can lead to more inclusive communities, more inclusive movements, and a better world for all.¹⁶³

The Civil Rights movement, and most recently the Black Lives Matter movement, both provide blueprints for a unified social movement that uses music as a tool. Music of the Civil Rights movement presents narratives of racial injustice, as bodies moved on the street chanting songs that empowered them against the white supremacist institutions of power. Whether it is “We gonna be alright” in Cleveland, Ohio after the Darren Wilson verdict, or “We shall not be Moved” ringing through the streets of Mississippi in the 1960s. These songs exalted people that suffer from racial terror in their everyday lives, it made the need for justice and equality louder.¹⁶⁴ Through this music, a reclamation of agency, a refusal of oppressing and silence, and a spirit of unity continues the fight for justice in the face of racial oppression. Historically, ‘Sorrow Songs’ expressed both the torment and anxiety of Blacks, as well as the power over singing hymns and prayers.¹⁶⁵ Using religious expression and activism, Black people throughout history

¹⁶² Ibid., 79-82.

¹⁶³ Ibid., 86.

¹⁶⁴ Andrew Limbong, “Both Party And Protest, ‘Alright’ Is The Sound Of Black Life’s Duality,” NPR.org, August 26, 2019, <https://www.npr.org/2019/08/26/753511135/kendrick-lamar-alright-american-anthem-party-protest>. Aisha Harris, “Is Kendrick Lamar’s ‘Alright’ the New Black National Anthem?,” Slate Magazine, August 3, 2015, <https://slate.com/culture/2015/08/black-lives-matter-protesters-chant-kendrick-lamars-alright-what-makes-it-the-perfect-protest-song-video.html>.

¹⁶⁵ Love, *Musical Democracy*, 91-3.

took to the streets in masse, to protest via singing and civil disobedience. This is continually met with firm resistance from white institutions of oppression. The power of these songs, however, even affected police officers that were there to quell the Civil Rights protests, as they continually caught themselves chanting “Civil Rights.”¹⁶⁶ Songs were improvised and sung anywhere by those who had earned the right to sing them. Gospel songs and church congregations began to sing songs of worship on the streets, keeping the same tunes while voicing centuries of historical oppression into a song. Much like the Black banjo griots in Appalachia, singers kept true to traditions of oral and musical communication of these long histories.¹⁶⁷ Civil Rights leaders, much like Black Lives Matter leaders, understand that songs and chants get people moving, energized, and unified against societal injustices. They force people to listen and hopefully invoke change.

Although music is not enough for change to occur, it is a “crucial site for symbolic resistance and a central feature of struggles for justice.”¹⁶⁸ It can move individuals to change their opinions who can then help change the structures of government. Bluegrass and hip hop provide narratives of oppressed peoples, both through historical understandings and messaging. For a musical democracy to succeed, or rather for a solidarity movement to take place in Martinsville, Virginia, there needs to first be a reckoning with the rich Black and white musical history and the treacherous racist institutions present in the community and country. A mobilization of these histories and stories, and the use of music as a tool, enables citizens to express themselves by dismantling the structures of Black and Appalachian oppression.¹⁶⁹

¹⁶⁶ Ibid., 96.

¹⁶⁷ Ibid., 97-101. Cecelia Conway, “Black Banjo Songsters in Appalachia,” *Black Music Research Journal* 23, no. 1/2 (2003): 149–66.

¹⁶⁸ Love, *Musical Democracy*, 108.

¹⁶⁹ Ron Eyerman and Andrew Jamison, *Music and Social Movements: Mobilizing Traditions in the Twentieth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 24-5.

Through music, Love provides five features for an inclusive, radical musical democracy. There must first be a resistance to universalize otherness, allowing for various views, races, religions, and languages, thereby asserting over all else inclusivity.¹⁷⁰ Secondly, as mentioned throughout, is the necessary understanding of different experiences and connections. For any movement to work in Appalachia, there is the need to incentivize the multitude of experiences of what it means to be an Appalachian and reckon with and address the histories of Black racial oppression. Third, a strong sense of community and an understanding of compromise, that not all will have the same vision, but unity is key to sustain an organization. Incomprehensibility is an inevitable byproduct of a social movement, however, through a focus of a common approach “they would engage in a collaborative and comprehensive struggle for all aspects of justice.”¹⁷¹ Fourth, they need to continue to be actors in politics, taking responsibility for themselves and others. Finally, there must be a binding together of all people for the betterment of humanity.¹⁷²

In sum, what musical forms, in this case bluegrass and hip hop, provide are avenues towards an understanding of place and space. Starting a social movement with a focus on music requires utmost patience and understanding. There is a need to continual reckoning with, and address, history that can prohibit collaboration. At the core, however, of any solidarity movement is the ability for individuals to take responsibility and enact change. The question that remains to be answered in some fashion is how this will look in Martinsville, and what it has in common with notions of Black liberation via the Black Lives Matter movement? In a brief conclusion I examine how other similar movements have operated in Appalachia and how they can connect with the messages of Black Lives Matter.

¹⁷⁰ Love, *Musical Democracy*, 117.

¹⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 117.

¹⁷² *Ibid.*, 117-8.

A Pathway Forward

Creating a pathway forward for Martinsville will not be an easy task and one that requires rigorous planning, strategy, and unity. Examining similar programs and movements across Appalachia provides not only an acknowledgement of place and histories of racism, but a framework to enable social justice in Martinsville. In Oak Ridge, Tennessee, the Oak Ridge Environmental Peace Alliance organizes against nuclear weapons and pollution in their town. They did so through persistent mobilization against the manufacturing of nuclear bombs at a community level, encouraging members to speak out. They also reach out to other groups combating issues such as racial injustice and healthcare, among others.¹⁷³ The group used methods of “creative tension” via art and protest to make known their goals and connections, to get serious about the issues of racism, and to create change in the community.¹⁷⁴ Oak Ridge’s community activism provides promising scaffolding for a solidarity movement partaking in activism across Appalachia, and opening discourse about other prominent issues that persist in the area. These types of changes anywhere, but particularly within Appalachia, require diverse groups of people and continued local involvement on what the goals are moving forward.

Returning to Cincinnati, Ohio, a key feature of the Urban Appalachian Commission is to address the disparity of funds for impoverished white communities who were denied access to community centers for being white. Leaders of the Urban Appalachian Commission had little funds but put their efforts towards building coalitions and inter-racial alliances. The Commission ran into issues of Appalachian inferiority, incentivizing Ernie Mynatt’s use of education and

¹⁷³ Ralph Hutchison, “Stop the Bombs: Local Organizing with Global Reach,” in *Transforming Places: Lessons from Appalachia*, ed. Barbara Ellen Smith and Stephen L. Fisher (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2012), 19–31.

¹⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 26–31.

identity-based organizing to challenge the perceptions of impoverished culturally degraded people.¹⁷⁵ Mynatt developed the Appalachian Festival to promote Appalachian heritage through local artists, musicians, and poets. The festival successfully addressed many of the stereotypes regarding Appalachia, and while they persist, the heritage festival's celebration has created a sense of pride and changed some perceptions of class and race misrepresentations.¹⁷⁶ In the mid-2000s, women in the region began to organize and demand support from local organizations and government. Using health as a primary organizing principle, the Women's Wellness Group organized using community relationships, experience, and autonomy.¹⁷⁷

Intrinsic to these organizations' success is the emphasis on Appalachian identity and heritage that enables individuals to find a place within society. Addressing race, Cincinnati leaders aimed to rid of the notions that "blacks are poor, and whites are not" by strategically applying an awareness of common heritage and group awareness of the problems of both impoverished white and Blacks. This allows for racial inclusivity, uniting white Urban Appalachians, and Black Appalachians in negotiation for resources rather than being in competition for them. Notably, listening to the experiences and needs of Black Appalachian residents helped to quell racial antagonism and established solidarity through similar goals and interests.¹⁷⁸

The third and final example involves the residents of Harlan County, Kentucky. Using similar political tools, residents' practice cultural resistance through singing "to forge a shared

¹⁷⁵ Philip J. Obermiller et al., "Identity Matters: Building an Urban Appalachian Movement in Cincinnati," 65-9.

¹⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 69, 73-4.

¹⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 71-2.

¹⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 72-3.

experience and develop a collective identity in social justice efforts.”¹⁷⁹ This raises important questions about race, class, and culture in building a common interest in local places. In 2001, local students saw the need for community dialogue, and they gathered input from residents on what they were concerned with. Most had seen religious, governmental, and non-profit organizations develop the area with no lasting impact or tangible aid to the citizens.¹⁸⁰ The group sought to create local grassroots programs that addressed the needs of all community members. Through community planning processes and participatory production of art, they were able to achieve this in some capacity. Focusing on the issue of drug addiction and dependency, local leaders organized theater productions and oral histories of the residents to build the social and political skills of participants. The plays and histories confront strained community relationships, racial discrimination, and a town grieving from problems of addiction with no outside support systems.¹⁸¹ Using music and oral histories, music director Ann Schertz developed a score for the play *Higher Ground* that incorporated bluegrass gospel, Black gospel, and white Pentecostal music. Listening to the musicians aligned with each genre, Schertz was able to collaborate with multiple experts who could relate the tempos, cadences, and experiences of each tradition.¹⁸²

With the primary emphasis on inclusivity, and authenticity, the Harlan County Project “centers around how to address longstanding divisions of class, race, religion, and geography that had become a “natural” part of the community.”¹⁸³ Using drug abuse, the group foresaw that more would agree with the destructive nature of drug addiction, and the subject would open communication on other divisions in the community as opposed to dividing opinion. By relating

¹⁷⁹ Maureen Mullinax, “Resistance through Community-Based Arts,” in *Transforming Places: Lessons From Appalachia*, ed. Barbara Ellen Smith and Stephen L. Fisher (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2012), 92.

¹⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 94.

¹⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 97.

¹⁸² *Ibid.*, 99.

¹⁸³ *Ibid.*, 101.

all of this to place, citizens were instilled with an education of the many problems that exist within their community. The continued participation of these programs indicates both an acknowledgment of these problems and a willingness to confront them. Identity and place are then not static signifiers but are malleable over time with the possibility for more conversations needed within the community.¹⁸⁴ This is not without challenges, but this project demonstrates that ideological shifts do occur. It takes time to educate, reckon with, address, and instill an anti-racist, inclusive, progressive organization. Through an acceptance of the privileged nature of whiteness and the recognition of racism and societal ills, and its addressal, planned community outreach can be accomplished a little at a time.¹⁸⁵

With these few examples, a blueprint for a similar movement within Martinsville, Virginia can be achieved with persistence and a responsible solidarity approach. A social movement or organization that recognizes its past, listens to the community, and pushes back against racism, classism and sentiments that pit individuals against one another at the cost of solidarity. Keeanga-Yamahtta Taylor indicates that “solidarity is only possible through continued struggle to win white workers to antiracism...to win the white working class to the understanding that, unless they struggle, they too will continue to live lives of poverty and frustration.”¹⁸⁶ Echoing this, Patricia Hill Collins indicates that because of white privilege in the U.S., whites do not have to confront issues of race and class and instead provoke them in a movement towards a more disjointed political structure as opposed to one of solidarity.¹⁸⁷ It is up to whites, in Appalachia and elsewhere, to recognize these racial terrors and unite with their

¹⁸⁴ Ibid., 102-3.

¹⁸⁵ Ibid., 104.

¹⁸⁶ Keeanga-Yamahtta Taylor, *From #BlackLivesMatter to Black Liberation* (Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2016), 215.

¹⁸⁷ Patricia Hill Collins, *From Black Power to Hip Hop: Racism, Nationalism, and Feminism* (Temple University Press, 2006). 179-84.

Black counterparts. If whites, particularly those back home in Martinsville, join in the fight against racial injustice, it will help unify a community that can work on providing for the needs of the community. Taylor emphatically states that Black liberation will always continue if Black people are not free, Black lives do matter. However, it takes a strategy that understands that Black people in the U.S. will not “get free” alone. Black liberation, for Taylor, is intimately bound with all projects of human liberation and social transformation.¹⁸⁸ For a solidarity movement that emphasizes music and narratives to exist, there must first be a recognition and addressment of our racial past, a continual attunement with the erased and fractured memories of our community. A reckoning that keeps us ‘in the wake.’

It takes recognition first and then a decision to join hands in the fight against racial injustice to liberate Blacks and whites alike in Martinsville, Appalachia, the U.S. and throughout the world. For Black liberation is bound with Appalachian liberation. It requires meeting in these fringe spaces of musical expression and listening to one another, providing stories and narratives that change can come. Our home matters because many have never had a place to call home that was safe and free from harm. Why not work with others to make this a reality? Only a continued effort of community organizing, and social justice projects can combat these injustices and tell new stories. The Appalachian protest song “Come all you coal Miners” asks people to listen to these stories, the banjo echoes, the racial terror, and the continued oppression of Appalachian communities, opening our eyes and hearts to what these dirty racist and capitalist institutions

¹⁸⁸ Taylor, *From #BlackLivesMatter to Black Liberation*, 194.

have done to you and me.¹⁸⁹ Only then will we be able to “sing across dark spaces” and move towards an inclusive movement that unites all those oppressed and weary.¹⁹⁰

¹⁸⁹ Sarah Gunning, “Come All You Coal Miners,” YouTube Music (Harlan County: Rounder Records, 1973).

¹⁹⁰ Stephen L. Fisher and Barbara Ellen Smith, *Transforming Places: Lessons from Appalachia* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2012), 288.

“Sing About me, I’m dying of thirst!”

“Exactly what'd happened if I ain't continue rappin'/Or steady being distracted by money drugs and four/ Fives, I count lives all on these songs/ Look at the weak and cry, pray one day you'll be strong/ Fighting for your rights, even when you're wrong/ And hope that at least one of you sing about me when I'm gone/ Am I worth it? / Did I put enough work in?” - Kendrick Lamar, “Sing about me, I’m Dying of Thirst”

The lyrics above symbolize struggle, recognition, reflection, and a continuation of the stories that need to be told. In many ways, this song moved me to write several hundred pages on narratives and histories that remain under-acknowledged despite their severity. Arguing throughout that long histories of racial oppression inform current conditions for Black and brown people around the country is only the beginning of shaping a new integrated historical narrative.

Acknowledging the racist intuitional ills of slavery that shape and persist in American norms and cultural beliefs provides the groundwork for understanding the reasoning behind erasing these memories and promoting color-blindness. Appalachia is of primary interest throughout, and contrary to color writers’ account of the region as one innocent of these evils, the region reflects racist American institutions. It is important to note that many in Appalachia suffer from stereotypes of backwardness, violence, ignorance, and poverty, limiting both outsiders’ understanding of the region and insiders’ ability to disassociate from these stereotypes. By not acknowledging the history of race and class antagonisms, and the lack of government help in Appalachia, however, these stereotypes problematize solidarity. What occurs in Appalachia is a product of white historical perspectives, a perspective that enables the arguments made by James Baldwin, Frantz Fanon, and David Roediger that the real race problem exists with whites, not Blacks. From slavery to the prison industrial complex, Black people have continually suffered and fought white supremacy in and out of Appalachia. Chapter one illustrates that these

historical struggles are entangled, and class through race divides many whose interests are aligned but remain divided by constructed barriers of race and class. By enabling beliefs of racial and class superiority, whites around the U.S. have bought into the belief that despite their own political, economic, and social shortcomings they are somehow better than Blacks. Sidestepping the real issues of power relations and white supremacy, whites throughout the U.S., particularly in Appalachia, evade the issues of racism and white privilege and instead proclaim white Appalachians are victims of racism.

Despite the existence of similar modes of oppression between Blacks and whites in Appalachia and the U.S. broadly, the historical oppression of Blacks has been decentered. Whites in Appalachia are ironically in opposition to minority populations, whose liberation is their liberation. It is important to repudiate claims that white Appalachians are an oppressed minority, as poor whites are not victims of racism but of class disadvantage. With a focus on examples of white suffering in Appalachia, the life chances and racial domination of Blacks is lost.¹ To pursue a solidarity movement in Appalachia, there must first be an acknowledgment of whiteness as privilege, as well as a historical recognition of racism against Black and brown people that whites do not experience, nor understand. This responsible solidarity can help liberate Blacks in the region, but for this to occur acknowledgement and the addressal of institutional white supremacy and Black erasure must occur. Without an understanding that white Appalachian oppression is not the same as Black oppression, a thick cross-racial solidarity is impossible.² These trends of class and racial domination lead to more complicated avenues for solidarity, but with a class-driven race conscious approach cognizant of the intersections of race

¹ Roseann Liu and Savannah Shange, "Toward Thick Solidarity: Theorizing Empathy in Social Justice Movements," *Radical History Review* 2018, no. 131 (May 1, 2018), 194-5.

² *Ibid.*, 196.

and class, new avenues are made possible. Recognition and education of the history and experiences of all Appalachians through race is imperative, but there needs to be a discourse that distinguishes these problems as different. There cannot be a conflation of experiences, rather an understanding of the differences and acknowledgement of incommensurability to center Black oppression to rid of racial injustice. Having such a perspective, as Barbara Ellen Smith emphatically describes, can unite people in and out of Appalachia, crossing boundaries and exploring new possibilities for movements resisting race and class oppression.³ It relies on telling new and old stories, singing songs, and resisting the conflation of white racial victimization to join those who endlessly suffer from white supremacy. Joining hands with Black and brown people in their fight for racial justice could lead to new avenues for an anti-racist, inclusive, and responsible, solidarity movement in Appalachia. One that acknowledges, and centers, racial injustice against Blacks and the integral role whiteness has in these processes. My hope is that a responsible solidarity movement such as this can provide new futures for all in Appalachia and the U.S.

Throughout this project, I have demonstrated how racial injustice in the U.S., also operates in the music industry. However, this racial injustice, traced throughout the dissertation, but thoroughly analyzed in chapter one, reveals that to develop a thick cross-racial solidarity movement, whiteness, and a reckoning of the history of racial injustice needs to occur. Relying on music as a tool to enable a thick solidarity movement, chapter two provides an analysis of how the music industry developed alongside institutions of racial injustice. I provide evidence of the racial injustice of the music industry, and the many Black voices that resisted racial injustice

³ Barbara Ellen Smith, "De-Gradations of Whiteness: Appalachia and the Complexities of Race," *Journal of Appalachian Studies* 10, no. 1/2 (2004): 38–57.

by continually reinventing musical styles to speak back against the racial injustice present in the U.S. and music industry. Thus, in an examination of the development of bluegrass and country, chapter two argues that despite the limitations on Black musical expression, Black artists were able to use the music industry, that attempted to exclude them, to address racial injustice throughout the country in their music. Building from this, chapter three examines how Black artists are continually exploited and oppressed in the genres they created as a resistance towards racial injustice. These genres, such as the blues, jazz, country, and hip hop, were all commercialized and used for white gain at the expense of Black communities. However, once again, despite this oppression, Black artists used their platform to combat racial injustice occurring across the country in their music. Hip hop is the current musical manifestation of Black musical expression that provides a voice for Black youth, continuing to connect the banjo echoes of enslaved Blacks to current issues of racial injustice. I provide evidence that hip hop enables Black voices to address racial injustice, and it operates as a tool for cross-racial solidarity that enables Black liberation in Appalachia and across the U.S. To achieve this locally, chapter four discusses the importance of reckoning with local histories of racial injustice. Using my hometown of Martinsville, Virginia, and the case of the Martinsville Seven, I argue that without an acknowledgement of these local histories of racial injustice and an acknowledgment of whiteness, a thick cross-racial solidarity movement cannot exist. Consequently, by enabling a recognition of these untold histories of racial injustice in the U.S., the music industry, and Martinsville, and acknowledging one's own whiteness, thick cross-racial solidarity can exist. Only a thick cross-racial solidarity movement, with music operating as a tool, allows for Black liberation in Martinsville, Appalachia, and the U.S. With Black liberation as central, liberation for all people will be possible.

Carrying out any form of cross-racial solidarity movement requires links, histories, and stories. Throughout I demonstrate that this is precisely what music provides. Chapter two illustrates the ways in which fractured memories of the music and instrumentation is a firm connection for solidarity in Appalachia. The African banjo operates as tool echoing the stories, and songs of enslaved and free Blacks and whites alike. The cross-cultural exchange of musical cultures is one filled with both pain of oppression and hope for better days. The music industry, entangled with racial discourse, followed similar patterns of racial oppression through exclusion of Black performers and introduction of Black-faced minstrelsy. By mocking and commercializing Black cultural practices, the music industry segregated Black and white musicians, creating separate categories of race and old-time music perpetuating harmful stereotypes of Black musicians. Despite the attempt of many Black artists to play the music they knew, many had to put down the banjo. The genres of race music and “hillbilly” music not only reinforced racism, but also commercialized and profited off Black cultural practices. Throughout the twenty-first century, with the development of country music and the fading of race records as a genre, Blacks were still unable to cross over into a genre they helped define and reinvigorate. Grounded in the stage performances of black-face minstrelsy, country music operates today as a genre reluctant to embrace and reckon with its racial past despite how it continues to commercialize Black cultural products. Emphasizing white blue-collar values, country music largely embraces conservative political ideologies while remaining silent on the race and class oppression apparent in the commercialization of the genre.

The banjo for this project is a way to recoup those lost histories, stories, and culture. It can connect all people in Appalachia who likely cross paths with this instrument, and by providing this history, there is also a reckoning with the past to create a better future.

Acknowledging the African banjo echoes in the Appalachian Mountains, echoes found in much of the music consumed today, allows for sharing and rooting conversations about racism that acknowledge white supremacy in the region. Re-telling the forgotten stories and applying them to today provides pathways towards remembrance, solidarity, and new forms of musical expression that unites people across cultural understandings and beliefs. This may just be for the love of the music, but even so, artists like Otis Taylor and Our Native Daughters tell old and new stories of the region that must be heard.

The stories of the banjo are aligned with new forms of music where many Black musicians sought new opportunities and created new genres such as the blues, jazz, soul, funk, and hip hop. Throughout the twentieth and twenty-first centuries Black musicians, despite segregation, racism, criminalization, social, political, and economic problems, developed music that allowed a platform to express themselves. The blues and jazz provided just that, albeit under similar racist institutions. Artists like Billie Holiday, Bessie Smith, and Ray Charles, however, challenged the boundaries given to them. They provided new sounds and challenged racism and class through musical expression and talent. This movement from minstrelsy to Black musical expression demonstrates the continuation of Black liberation against oppressive racial institutions. These political, economic, and social developments are not only groundbreaking in past contexts, but they also demonstrate the organizational potential popular music has. The Civil Rights Movement used these songs as tools for unity, liberation, protest, change, and voice for millions of people across the U.S. Returning to the concept of recognition, these musical histories of early Black music tell different, yet pivotal stories. These narratives provide alternatives toward oppression, as Black jazz artists sought to propel their voice the way they knew how: music. Music is not the way to change society; that is done by social movements and

protest, but the songs used provided the tools to unite and carry the promise of racial justice throughout the country. Despite its mass commercialization, this music connected within Appalachia inspiring many artists like Dock Boggs to write blues songs for both commercial and personal reasons.

Into the late twentieth century, the development of hip hop music and culture, combined with elements of past musical genres, provided a voice for Black youth around the country. Due to its massive popularity, it also connects with white suburban populations, albeit sometimes through problematic depictions of Black life. The problems of mass commercialization and neoliberal messaging found in rap music that designates itself as “real” Black culture are troubling. Despite the problems illustrated by Tricia Rose and Lester Spence, rap music for Black artists operates as a mechanism of resistance against commercialization by acknowledging and addressing societal problems found in their communities. These messages are then consumed and applied by individuals locally as a method of expression or as a liberatory religious practice. I conclude the project with the track “Sing About Me, I’m Dying of Thirst” precisely because the ability for rap artists to viscerally connect with audiences and speak their stories and truths is just as powerful as it was one hundred years ago when Bessie Smith made her records. Mass commercialization and racism is a product of the music industry, and what the history of Black musical cultures and practices demonstrate is the need to tell untold stories to keep stories of oppressed groups of people alive and continue to critique the white supremacist racist institutions. As rappers like Tupac, Kendrick Lamar, A Tribe Called Quest, Common, J. Cole, Talib Kweli, among many others, provide a voice for Black youth, and white youth, to listen to and relate with the stories they tell. Truthfulness aside, by telling stories of oppression and hope, rap music and hip hop culture provides a basis for a social movement, one that

recognizes, acknowledges, and provides past and current histories of racial and class oppression. Hip hop provides a place of expression and allows for all people to express their concerns about their current and past situations. Appalachia is a place where many speak their truths and deal with painful histories that can allow for solidarity and healing. The songs and stories heard in hip hop provide a lens into the past and future, supplying both painful histories as well as promises and hope of a better world. These musical histories and narratives echo throughout the Appalachian Mountains. The banjo operates as a connection, a point of recognition for people inside and out of Appalachia. Musical narratives provide much more than entertainment; they provide recognition of problems and they give impetus to act and join in solidarity against white supremacist oppression. Most importantly, music provides hope and comfort for a better, more aware society. Hip hop is not the answer to our societal problems, but it voices them, just like the banjo did so long ago.

My hometown of Martinsville, Virginia, and the history of the Martinsville Seven is only one part of the horrific racism that exists in the history of the community. The history of the trials reveals important racial distinctions and processes that still exist today. Black men immediately criminalized, coerced into confession, and sentenced to death by all white juries is indicative of the problems that exist today in the streets of any American community. Recollecting these past traumas and presenting them to my hometown was a process of reckoning, archival retrieval, and pain. Injustices like these continue to persist, and these seven men despite their crime were a part of a racist institution that sought to legally lynch Black people. The Martinsville Seven provides a hometown awareness of these racial institutions and an example of how racism persists legally. Narratives and the logic of racial oppression must be reckoned with, as this story coexists with the countless other horrors Black people face every

day. My community and I cannot change the past, but the point is to learn from it and move against racial and class oppression that continue to plague Black households. Beginning conversations of the histories and legacies of racism are difficult, especially when they are local, but allowing these legacies to continue will only hold back the community, region, state, and country. Bluntly connecting all these histories not only seeks to operate as a process of reckoning, but as a path towards a process of responsible solidarity. Providing these accounts is not only essential to solidarity, but to a healing of a community.

Thus, musical democracy offers a pathway forward as it opens new spaces and places for previously unheard voices. It enables the movement of people and provides a catalyst for change that enhances political experiences. Songs that speak to places in a certain location allow for an intimate connection with the problems that exist in a certain demographic but can also stretch across boundaries and allow others to connect with similar situations. These processes are common in rap music, as places like Compton, the Bronx, and specific locations are used to connect with an audience about problems in their communities that may also exist in yours. In Appalachia, catering to old protest anthems that seeks to organize Appalachians against the oppressive systems of coal mining, classism, and racism do just that. By using these songs as a pathway towards solidarity, a musical democracy can imagine a new place, a new space, a new Appalachia that resists and reimagines itself in anti-racist ways. Tyler Childers is correct in his understanding that to change our racist society, all Appalachians must acknowledge and reckon with the long violent history our Black neighbors experience daily. Black Lives Matter is a call for unity and solidarity in the belief that Black lives do matter and U.S. institutions historically say otherwise. To reckon and move forward with a solidarity movement in Martinsville, there needs to be community programs that educate, discuss, and aid all people that need it. Providing

resources and building community coalitions enables a reckoning of this history and allows us to sing songs forgotten. New avenues are possible, and Appalachia is a fertile place for change, as it always has been.

I continue to reflect on what this project means to me and my hometown and the horrific violence against Black people that seemingly goes unnoticed. Returning to Kendrick Lamar's track "Sing About Me, I'm Dying of Thirst," I am reminded that this project is not about me, but rather those that came before and those that will come after. For Martinsville, Virginia, or any community in the U.S. to move towards solidarity, historical patterns of racism, class oppression, and violence must be addressed. The banjo echoes heard in music is a path toward this, but is not the only answer, as more research and knowledge building must be done for a path towards a more just society. As stated throughout, Black liberation will continue without whites, but it can only help to join in a movement that aims for fairer treatment and admonishes systems of oppression. In sum, why not join or start a movement that benefits all people? Future research plans are to return home and work with my community and others like it to combat structural racism and class oppression that exists. Providing conversations and promoting unity in times of division seems necessary. I must work with my friends, family, and the rest of my community hoping one day we will be strong together.

This project provides avenues for change through a process of reckoning and listening to the African banjo echoes that reverberate in our society today. Continued progress is something that will not occur overnight and indeed takes many years to create actual momentum. The goal is to create new discourses, enable new scholarship and conversations, and allow for all unheard voices in Appalachia to be heard. The question we should ask ourselves is: did I put enough work in? Because "when the lights go off and it's my turn to settle down," I promise that "I will

sing about you.”⁴ These stories need to be told, no matter how painful. Racial institutions have separated the potential for a responsible community solidarity and, with a historical awareness of these ills, narratives, and songs, new inclusive places of anti-racist communities must replace our current racist systems and institutions.

⁴ Kendrick Lamar, “Sing About Me, I’m Dying of Thirst.” YouTube Music. (2012: TopDawg Entertainment).

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