

FOREWORD

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FOR CENTURIES VARIOUS ETHNIC, CULTURAL, and social groups throughout the world have used music as a form of resistance against dictatorial rulers, oppressive governments, and capitalist structures. Folklorists, ethnomusicologists, African Americanists, cultural historians, and cultural sociologists have long recognized the power of music to empower people, to galvanize them into political action, and to sustain social movements. Their publications critique the role of music in labor movements (Fowke and Glazer 1973; Green et al. 2007), social movements (Eyerman and Jamison 1998; Roy 2010; Reagon 2017), and individual and group acts of defiance (Levine 1977; Maultsby 2015a, 2015b; Neal 2017), as well as its use to empower during and following conflict, violence, and war (Urla 2001; Hemetek 2006; McDonald 2009; O'Connell and Castelo-Branco 2010; Rogers 2012; Dave 2014). Since the seventeenth century, music has been central to the sociopolitical movements of black Americans, who continue to fight against all forms of institutional racism that impact negatively on black lives, especially in the areas of social justice, employment, housing, and education.

The Black Lives Matter movement is a contemporary expression of both pride and resistance, rooted in a tradition that began when Europeans used force to remove Africans from their homeland and place them into bondage. Chained together on the lower decks of ships and tightly packed much like sardines in a can, these black bodies endured all forms of inhumane

treatment during the long voyage to the Americas. They were beaten, kicked around like animals, forced to lay in their own bodily waste, and required to dance to the beats of drums for exercise. Determined to retain their pride and dignity, on the ships and in the Americas, Africans engaged in acts of defiance by using the drum and coded song to communicate details to the masses.

Throughout the history of slavery in the United States, black male and female bodies suffered brutal beatings, dog maulings, hangings, and other savage acts of murder. In retaliation, the enslaved organized revolts and mapped out escape routes to freedom. Music played a central role in these acts of resistance. During the 1739 South Carolina Stono Rebellion, drums and loud horns became communication devices, signaling places to gather and times to strike. Following the enactment of laws by the colonies that forbade the playing of drums and other loud instruments, along with unsupervised gatherings, the enslaved turned to clandestine forms of communication. The use of the double entendre or coded texts in their spiritual songs, such as “Steal Away” and “Follow the Drinking Gourd,” provided instructions for planned escapes to freedom. The enslaved also expressed defiance through song, proudly proclaiming, “Befo’ I’d be a slave, I’d be buried in my grave, And go home to my Lord and be saved.”

The rise of the Ku Klux Klan (KKK) following Reconstruction and the rigid Jim Crow laws led to open attacks on black bodies. Beatings and hangings became common forms of entertainment—violent acts of leisure—in rural white communities, with members of the KKK, sheriffs, and other law enforcement officers participating in these hideous crimes. Moreover, all-white juries ruled a “not guilty” verdict for any white perpetrator yet imposed a “guilty” verdict for any black person jailed on trumped-up charges, such as disrespecting a white man or woman. Everyday life proved challenging for black men, including those working on levee camps in Mississippi. Disregarding their economic value, Memphis Slims recalls that “them straw bosses would beat you dead. Mister Charlie say, ‘Kill a nigger, hire another. But kill a mule you got to buy another.’ You see they treated a mule better than a Negro back then in those camps” (Barlow 1989, 52).

The savage 1955 murder of Emmett Till, a fourteen-year-old boy from Chicago who had been visiting relatives in Mississippi and was accused of whistling at a white woman, continued one of many brutal acts of violence

against black bodies that escalated and gave rise to the civil rights and Black Power movements. Local African American communities began organizing at the grassroots level and participating in various protest activities to force change in the oppressive conditions under which they lived. Music provided the source for inspiration and served as a tool for organizing and galvanizing communities into political action.

The Black Lives Matter movement continues the practice of using music as personal and group expressions to organize and peacefully protest racial injustices, including sanctioned police and civilian brutality against black bodies. Led by millennials in response to the unjustified murder of Trayvon Martin in 2013, followed by the killings of Mike Brown, Sandra Bland, and others in subsequent years, the scope of this movement is far-reaching. It encompasses social issues of environmental justice, criminal justice, and black political empowerment, highlighting themes of marginalization and black affirmation. Nevertheless, and overlapping the rise of the Black Lives Matter movement, we have witnessed increases in the membership of alt-right groups and the collaboration with the KKK, neo-Nazis, and neo-Confederates in public demonstrations. As they protested the removal of Confederate statues around the country, the hate rhetoric and violent activities of these groups were on full display during the “Unite the Right” rally in Charlottesville, Virginia (August 12, 2017), which resulted in the killing of a counterprotester and injuring several others. President Donald Trump’s laissez-faire attitude toward the expressions of white supremacy organizations prompted the Black Lives Matter network to demand a ban on all Confederate iconography and hate groups in the United States and to affirm, “We stand with the people of Charlottesville who are fighting for a world in which the inherent humanity of all people is honored” (Morrison 2017).

Against the backdrop of urban decay, community isolation, and limited financial resources, advocates of the Black Lives Matter movement use social media and contemporary creative expressions—hip hop; R&B; go-go; techno; and the Houston, Texas, SLAB car culture—to expose and confront these and other social injustices, and to inspire change through social and political activism. Critics label Black Lives Matter as antipolice and anti-American, in the same way that they treated the Black Panthers Party for Self-Defense, a branch of the Black Power movement. Such views ignore centuries of racial animosities resulting from centuries of institutional

racism and sanctioned violence inflicted on black bodies that produced adversarial relationships between law enforcement and African American communities (Harding 1981; Anderson 2016).

This history distinguishes the #BlackLivesMatter movement from the #AllLivesMatter response. White lives have always mattered, as evidenced by their privileged status, especially with regard to the criminal justice system and the ostensible “white-collar crime” category. Skin color frequently determines longer sentences for African Americans who have been convicted of the same crime committed by whites. Skin color also determines when drug use shifts from being a criminal offense to a treatable addiction. White privilege reigns supreme when judges grant the wealthy freedom or probationary sentencing for repugnant crimes (Muhammad 2010).

The contradiction of the #AllLivesMatter claim is most evident in the lack of racial diversity in the faculty of the nation’s institutions of higher learning, where preference is given to a Eurocentric curriculum supported by a Eurocentric interpretation. Even more glaring is the lack of creative approaches to instruction that engages in nonthreatening conversations about race and ethnicity, which should begin in elementary school, and certainly by high school. How can we claim All Lives Matter when the majority of those lives are excluded from the educational curriculum? Music, especially hip hop and other contemporary forms, is a useful tool to explore race and a range of social issues. Such explorations potentially can contribute to a more nuanced and objective critique of the Black Lives Matter movement and also provide concrete evidence that All Lives Matter.

Black Lives Matter and Music: Protest, Intervention, Reflection expands on the vibrant roundtable discussions led by former students during the 2015 and 2016 conferences of the Society for Ethnomusicology and the American Folklore Society, respectively. The students’ scholarly engagement with these disciplines extends from teaching and research to the social, cultural, and political activism that has gained traction through public ethnomusicology and applied folklore—those who apply their research to areas of public interest, contributing to what Jeff Titon calls “practice-informed theory” (1992, 315). Drawing from ethnographic research and personal encounters, the contributors illustrate how our work can add to the public awareness of the social, economic, political, scientific, and other forms of injustices in the society that spill over into institutions of higher learning and influence the

curricula, pedagogical approaches, and treatment of minority students and faculty, as well as their responses to acts of resistance.

Black Lives Matter and Music foregrounds black music as a window into black life, thereby revealing the conditions that gave rise to and underscored the need for the Black Lives Matter movement. Moreover, it is a story about how black millennials demonstrate resilience and creativity as they challenge all forms of racial injustices, gender inequalities, and political systems that work against the empowerment of all black people—whether they reside in inner-city communities, middle-class suburbs, working-class neighborhoods, or rural towns. The chapters that follow range from personal experience to ethnographic studies to putting ethnomusicology to use and illustrating the role of music in acts of resistance that brought national attention to the Black Lives Matter movement.

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INTRODUCTION

Fernando Orejuela

"WE GON' BE ALRIGHT! WE gon' be alright!" More than a century of African American music-making, and the call for freedom, sustenance, and survival remains central. The hook from Kendrick Lamar's 2015 song, "Alright," was incorporated into a chant that reverberated at marches and demonstrations nationwide and was adopted as one of the most prevalent anthems of the Black Lives Matter movement. Reflecting on his influence on Kendrick Lamar's work, O.G. Ice Cube exclaimed, "I just feel like we're all a continuum of one thought, which is equality" (Goldman 2016, 53).¹ Lamar's hook echoes sonically a history of freedom songs created by African-descended people in the United States.

At protest rallies and marches, the "We gon' be alright!" chant is performed in the style and cadence and African American English vernacular delivered by Lamar's original recording. Drawing on the pioneering work of Bernice Johnson Reagon, the power of the chant comes from "the richness of Afro-American harmonic techniques and improvisation choral singing" (2001, 108). Johnson Reagon explains that the one-word lyric and sacred chant of "Amen" triggered subsequent refrains and codified lines understood by slaves in the performance of the spiritual. The musically simple chant engendered a new force when it shifted to the more literal "freedom" by student activists fighting for civil rights and social justice. "We gon' be alright!" is a re-versioning of that sonic tradition in the ongoing battle against oppression, disenfranchisement, inequality, exploitation, and death.

Lamar's song was released three years after Alicia Garza, a labor organizer for the National Domestic Worker's Alliance in Oakland, California, formed the nascent and largely dispersed coalition of activists whom we call Black Lives Matter. On July 13, 2013, the day George Zimmerman was found not guilty of second-degree murder and acquitted of manslaughter in the fatal shooting of Trayvon Martin, an unarmed black teenager walking home in his Sanford, Florida, neighborhood, Garza took to Facebook and wrote an open "love letter to black people." Dismayed by the response of some Americans, she wrote, "The sad part is, there is a section of America who is cheering and celebrating right now. . . . I continue to be surprised how little black lives matter. . . . Black people. I love you. I love us. Our lives matter." Along with Opal Tometi and Patrisse Cullors, the trio popularized the phrase as a hashtag on Twitter and Tumblr, sparking discussion about race and equality around the world. The hashtag then led to a networked movement. Disappointment and grief might have initiated the first responses, but the Black Lives Matter movement inaugurates a new era in the struggle for racial justice.

The idea for this book, *Black Lives Matter and Music: Protest, Intervention, Reflection*, grew out of several discussions with colleagues and a pair of academic conference presentations. In January 2015, my colleague Stephanie Shonekan approached me and other ethnomusicologists, Fredara Hadley, Eileen M. Hayes, Langston Collin Wilkins, and Denise Dalphond, to participate in a forum at the 2015 annual meeting for members of the Society for Ethnomusicology. We held a roundtable discussion titled "Black Music Matters: Taking Stock" to consider the threats and challenges to black music scenes as well as the strength of black music and its ability to serve as an expression of black life in the midst of the Black Lives Matter movement.

Since that moment, many other African Americans have died, many at the hands of the police, but the killing of Michael Brown of Ferguson, Missouri, on August 9, 2014, a significant tipping point, catapulted the Black Lives Matter movement into plain view on social media sites and news networks. At the same time, musicians started releasing songs in tandem with the movement's development. Songs like J. Cole's "Be Free" (2014), D'Angelo and the Vanguard's "The Charade" (2014), The Game's "Don't Shoot" (2014), Janelle Monáe's "Hell You Talmbout" (2015), Usher's

"Chains" (2015), Kendrick Lamar's "Alright" (2015), and others provided a thematic soundscape the panelists could analyze and critique—activist music flooding the airwaves and heralding a new period of activism for the second millennium.² However, a series of events at our colleague's university in particular made us reconsider our approach.

On November 3, 2015, Jonathan Butler, a University of Missouri graduate student, started his hunger strike in an effort to force the president of the university to resign for his lack of concern and inaction regarding the racial violence experienced by students of color on the Mizzou campus. This event coincided with the protests in Ferguson that were in collaboration with the Black Lives Matter movement. The students on campus took action. Some faculty took action. The Mizzou football team took action. On November 9, 2015, President Tim Wolfe announced his resignation and Butler ended his hunger strike.

Each of the panelists came to the conference with a different presentation than we had intended or had originally prepared. Analysis and critique of music text and sonic dimensions remain important to what we do, but we came to the event addressing other facets of the Black Lives Matter movement as they have affected our regions. We approached the topic locally, and personally. The conversation that ensued at the conference was energetic, uncomfortable, and very necessary. Lively discourse is good, but we remained unsatisfied. More trauma, injustices, and heartbreaks were yet to slow down. Given our training in ethnomusicology and folklore as well as the common concerns with common problems in folkloristics, ethnomusicology, and other disciplines in the social and cultural studies arena, we thought it was important to have a similar dialogue at the 2016 annual meeting of the American Folklore Society. We brought with us younger scholars, Langston Collin Wilkins and Alison Martin, who were closer in age to the activists mobilized at Black Lives Matter demonstrations. In the twelve months that passed between these two conferences, the tragic killings of unarmed black men and women continued at an alarming rate and in conjunction with the volume and intensity of the varied reactions and critiques of the American criminal justice system.

As a collective, we felt compelled to expand on the evolving narratives and discourses that continued without effective solutions sixty years after