

## Forum

# Leaders of the New School? Music Departments, Hip-Hop, and the Challenge of Significant Difference

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### Abstract

The last two decades have witnessed a dramatic rise in dissertations, theses, and other academic publications exploring hip-hop music, while college courses on hip-hop history have become commonplace. The growing prominence of hip-hop music in our curricular and research agendas, however, does not necessarily make the study of music at colleges and universities more inclusive. In fact, the increasing attention musicologists and music theorists are paying to rap paradoxically threatens to shore up the value of whiteness in the discipline. This contribution addresses the problem by seeking answers to three interrelated questions: (1) What can the incorporation of hip-hop teach us about the challenges of ‘diversity’ in music departments primarily devoted to the study and performance of Western classical music? (2) Does the work of non-Black scholars who write about music made by Black bodies contribute to the freeing of those bodies, or merely represent yet another way that they are consumed by white supremacy? (3) How can popular music studies help to overcome ongoing racial inequality within schools and departments of music? The arrival of hip-hop in music departments represents an opportunity to move in bold new directions. If we want to create a more just future for musicology and music theory, then the study of hip-hop in these fields will need to be accompanied by efforts to introduce forms of ‘significant difference’ that transform our respective disciplines as well as the institutions within which we work.

Many of the current strategies that propose to make marginal cultures visible and accessible tend to reproduce ideologies of racism, as well as male dominance and

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middle-class privilege.

Angela Y. Davis<sup>1</sup>

The anti-Black world continually finds new ways, across an astonishing diversity of political, economic, and cultural conjunctures, to consume and use Blackness in manners that extend the interlocutory life of the captive Black body for the coherence and morality of the 'human' community.

P. Khalil Saucier and Tyron P. Woods<sup>2</sup>

You can change the whiteness of an image in order to keep the whiteness of a thing.

Sara Ahmed<sup>3</sup>

I completed this contribution while teaching a six-week summer course on the history of hip-hop. Offered online due to Covid-19, the class took place in the midst of widespread national and international protests against systemic racism. During week two of our term, the video of white Minneapolis police officer Derek Chauvin kneeling on the neck of George Floyd, a Black man, and ultimately killing him, was broadcast widely through news outlets and social media, sparking protests against police brutality, white supremacy, and rampant inequality. My students, many of whom participated in protests occurring in their respective communities, noted repeatedly how the music we were studying related directly to current events. Our unit on N.W.A and West Coast gangsta rap, for example, delved into the United States' war on drugs and its effects on policing and mass incarceration, issues that are central to the Black Lives Matter movement's call to defund the police.<sup>4</sup> Students learned about the Los Angeles Police Department's infamous 'Batterram', immortalized in song by rapper Toddy Tee, and how this armoured vehicle symbolized the growing militarization of municipal police forces, the effects of which we see confronting today's protesters.<sup>5</sup> The week that we read Robin D. G. Kelley's essay explaining how gangsta rappers used beats and rhymes to fire back (symbolically) at their criminalization by state authorities, protesters in Minneapolis blasted Lil Boosie's 'Fuck the Police' over loudspeakers while facing off with Minneapolis Police Department forces at the Third Precinct.<sup>6</sup>

I wanted to feel some satisfaction about the 'relevance' of my teaching in this particular moment, especially as students excitedly shared new tracks by their favourite artists

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- 1 Angela Y. Davis, 'Gender, Class, and Multiculturalism: Rethinking "Race" Politics', in *Mapping Multiculturalism*, ed. Avery F. Gordon and Christopher Newfield (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996), 40.
  - 2 P. Khalil Saucier and Tyron P. Woods, 'Hip Hop Studies in Black', *Journal of Popular Music Studies*, 26/2-3 (2014), 268-9.
  - 3 Sara Ahmed, *Living a Feminist Life* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2017), 153.
  - 4 See Michelle Alexander, *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness* (New York: New Press, 2012); Black Lives Matter. 'Defund the Police', 30 May 2020, <https://blacklivesmatter.com/defundthepolice/>.
  - 5 Toddy Tee, 'Batterram', 12" single, Evejim Records, EJ 1979, 1985; Radley Balko, *Rise of the Warrior Cop: The Militarization of America's Police Forces* (New York: Public Affairs, 2014).
  - 6 Robin D. G. Kelley, *Race Rebels: Culture, Politics, and the Black Working Class* (New York: Free Press, 1994), 183-227; *CrimethInc*, 'The Siege of the Third Precinct in Minneapolis: An Account and Analysis', 10 June 2020, <https://crimethinc.com/2020/06/10/the-siege-of-the-third-precinct-in-minneapolis-an-account-and-analysis>.

critiquing racism and police brutality. Instead, however, Floyd's killing and the growing calls to address racial inequality, not just in policing but also in all facets of American life, forced me to reflect on my role as a teacher and scholar of hip-hop. After all, haven't we been here before?

In years past, I have said the names of Trayvon Martin, Renisha McBride, Michael Brown, Jordan Davis, Sandra Bland, Tamir Rice, and other Black victims of racist violence in my classes. But does researching and teaching about Black music ensure that I am addressing racism through my work? Is the effort I put into preparing my lectures or the respect that I show for Black musicians in my courses enough of a response to the ongoing destruction of Black lives? As William Cheng warns, celebrating Black resiliency to racism in hip-hop can have the double-edged effect of naturalizing Black suffering and oppression.<sup>7</sup> In fact, I am disturbed by how easily the slides that I created in the wake of Michael Brown's 2014 killing and the subsequent Ferguson uprising could be recycled for the present moment, leaving me to wonder if one of my main roles at the university is to teach mostly white, mostly middle-class students how to intelligently consume Black pain.

This contribution is, in part, an effort to transform my existential dread about what Saidiya Hartman has called the 'translation of Black suffering into white pedagogy' into something useful.<sup>8</sup> As the organizers of this forum rightly acknowledge in their introduction, our academic concerns 'are part of the larger reckonings going on all around us: the world is not as it should be; the future must be different'. Thus, I seek answers to three interrelated questions:

1. What can the incorporation of hip-hop and popular music studies teach us about the challenges of 'diversity' in music departments primarily devoted to the study and performance of Western classical music?
2. Does the work of non-Black scholars who write about music made by Black bodies contribute to the freeing of those bodies, or merely represent yet another way that they are consumed by white supremacy?
3. How can popular music studies help to overcome ongoing racial inequality within schools and departments of music?

7 William Cheng, 'Black Noise, White Ears: Resilience, Rap, and the Killing of Jordan Davis', *Current Musicology*, 102 (Spring 2018).

8 Saidiya Hartman discusses the perverse relationship between black pain and white enlightenment: 'What we see now is a translation of Black suffering into white pedagogy. In this extreme moment, the casual violence that can result in a loss of life – a police officer literally killing a Black man with the weight of his knees on the other's neck – becomes a flash point for a certain kind of white liberal conscience, like: "Oh my god! We're living in a racist order! How can I find out more about this"? That question is a symptom of the structure that produces Floyd's death. Then there's the other set of demands: "Educate me about the order in which we live". And it's like: "Oh, but you've been living in this order. Your security, your wealth, your good life, has depended on it". So, it's crazy-making'. Catherine Dammen, 'Interview: Saidiya Hartman on Insurgent Histories and the Abolitionist Imaginary', *ARTFORUM*, 14 July 2020, [www.artforum.com/interviews/saidiya-hartman-83579](http://www.artforum.com/interviews/saidiya-hartman-83579).

These questions are critical because the last two decades have witnessed a dramatic rise in dissertations, theses, articles, and books exploring hip-hop music, while college courses on hip-hop history have become commonplace. Although it is nice to see more music scholars as excited about Nas and the Notorious B.I.G. as they are about Bach and Beethoven, those of us hoping to address racial inequality in music departments cannot expect an increased familiarity with Black cultural production to stand in for racial progress. As hip-hop historian and political activist Jeff Chang explains, the growing prominence of racialized entertainment and people of colour featured in advertising often presents the look of multiculturalism without any corresponding commitment to social justice.<sup>9</sup> Similarly, the growing prominence of hip-hop music in our curricular and research agendas does not necessarily make the study of music at colleges and universities more inclusive.

These issues are especially acute for those of us who teach and research hip-hop in musicology and music theory, disciplines where the scarcity of Black voices has reached satirical proportions. I vividly remember when a widely read musicology blog posted an ‘AMS bingo card’ in anticipation of the 2011 meeting in San Francisco, and one of the boxes read: ‘All White Hip Hop Panel’.<sup>10</sup> More recently in 2018, at the joint meeting of the American Musicological Society and Society for Music Theory in San Antonio, an AMS session devoted to the future of hip-hop studies did not feature any Black speakers. Lauron Kehrer, the session’s chair, recognized this problem and addressed it directly in her presentation, noting: ‘As hip-hop scholars we are celebrating the increased presence and visibility of scholarship on a Black music practice in our societies, and yet we continue to have these largely, if not entirely white panels.’<sup>11</sup> She therefore encouraged other non-Black hip-hop scholars ‘to consider how our approaches to scholarship might be contributing to the marginalization of Black scholars as well as Blackness in our work’, asking, ‘Are we erasing Blackness in our academic discussions of hip-hop, especially when discussing the music?’ I fear the answer to Kehrer’s question is too often ‘yes’. As I will attempt to explain in this contribution, the incorporation of hip-hop studies in US music departments threatens to shore up the value of whiteness in those same institutions.

### Keeping the whiteness of a thing

In order to understand this paradox – how the incorporation of Black music could reinforce whiteness – we have to examine the racial economy of music departments in an age of so-called diversity and inclusion. In the last few decades, music schools have attempted to become more diverse through initiatives designed to broaden their curricula and attract under-represented students. Hoping to increase ethnic and racial minority representation and to avoid being left behind by other departments on campus offering competing courses on popular music, faculty members and administrators have added new courses on previously marginalized topics,

9 Jeff Chang, *Who We Be: A Cultural History of Race in Post-Civil Rights America* (New York: St Martin’s Press, 2014).

10 The image of the AMS bingo card has been removed from the internet, but the blog in question is *When in Musicology*, [wheninmusicology.tumblr.com](http://wheninmusicology.tumblr.com).

11 Lauron Kehrer, ‘Diversity and Discipline in Hip-Hop Studies’, paper presented at the American Musicological Society/Society for Music Theory, San Antonio, TX, 4 November 2018.

including hip-hop. These changes, though positive in some respects, have not yet stimulated a widespread re-evaluation of institutional priorities and commitments. Although most campuses now offer courses exploring the history and cultural dynamics of diverse musical forms around the world, such coursework tends to be elective or geared towards fulfilling the general education requirements of non-majors. In some cases, these courses are not even open to music majors, or, if they are, they do not satisfy music degree requirements. In other words, music departments have been slow to change their core curricula, the parts that form the foundation of the study of performance, history, theory, and ensemble work.

As I have argued elsewhere, these dynamics reflect a deeply held 'possessive investment' in Western classical music that allows colleges and universities to exploit student interest in popular music to subsidize classical music instruction.<sup>12</sup> As market-based ideologies play an increasingly large role in setting priorities within higher education, at many institutions academic units are pitted against one another in competition for tuition dollars, which are distributed proportionally to units based on how many students they teach and how many majors they graduate. This competition has compelled deans and department chairs to diversify their offerings, adding new courses on popular topics.

Under financial pressure to pay for the small class sizes and one-on-one instruction demanded by conservatory-style instruction, many schools have turned to large general education classes on rock and roll, hip-hop, and other popular music genres to fund studio lessons and ensemble instruction in classical repertoire. Even in cases where tuition dollars are not tied directly to enrolment numbers, the division persists: with comprehensive education in classical music on the one hand, and a smattering of general education courses covering popular music history on the other. In this way, even curricular changes that appear to redress past exclusions can find themselves co-opted to preserve the status quo.<sup>13</sup>

Music history and theory courses on Black popular music, much like 'world music' courses in ethnomusicology, not only serve as token gestures of diversity masking the whiteness of the core curriculum, but they also generate symbolic and material value for music departments without receiving a commensurate share of the school's resources or attention. Even musicologists and theorists lucky enough to teach courses on Black music topics are complicit with this system when the other courses they are expected to teach – the ones that are treated as truly indispensable knowledge – reinforce a white-centred curriculum.

In his article 'Music Theory and the White Racial Frame', Philip Ewell takes aim at music theory's single-minded focus on the music and ideas of white men, detailing the way in which the discipline supports a racially exclusive curriculum that marginalizes women and people of colour. He presents depressing statistics about music theory's lack of diversity in just about every context, including society committees, editorial boards, textbooks, and scholarly

12 Loren Kajikawa, 'The Possessive Investment in Classical Music: Confronting Legacies of White Supremacy in U.S. Schools and Departments of Music', in *Seeing Race Again: Countering Colorblindness Across the Disciplines*, ed. Kimberlé Crenshaw, Luke Harris, George Lipsitz, and Daniel Martinez HoSang (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2019).

13 Kajikawa, 'The Possessive Investment in Classical Music', 165–6.

publications.<sup>14</sup> Despite such evidence, racism and sexism are rarely discussed in the field. When the topic of equity is raised, it is usually confined, Ewell explains, to the purview of a diversity committee, allowing business as usual to proceed everywhere else.<sup>15</sup> Despite these glaring problems, music theorists and musicologists rarely discuss the essential knowledge of their field in racial terms. ‘Colourblind’ standards of research objectivity and authority allow white supremacist assumptions about musical legitimacy to remain baked into the foundation of the field.

Ewell’s target is understandably the all-white-male canon of composers and theorists, and his critique provoked an angry response from senior scholars in the *Journal of Schenkerian Studies*.<sup>16</sup> Their defensive posturing and ad hominem attacks were condemned widely online through social media and also by the Executive Board of the Society for Music Theory as a display of white supremacy in action.<sup>17</sup> Although it was heartening to see hundreds of music theorists and musicologists rising to Ewell’s defence, many of the *JSS* authors’ open hostility and refusal to engage in good faith with Ewell’s work made them an easy target, leaving me to wonder about the subtler ways that the white racial frame exerts influence on the field. What about music theorists and musicologists who choose to work on non-canonical topics and those who depart from established methods, such as Schenkerian analysis?

Consider, for example, the growing list of publications by music theorists writing about hip-hop.<sup>18</sup> Their work has focused attention on Black artists and given colleagues and

14 According to SMT’s demographic statistics and Ewell’s research, over 90 per cent of music theory’s full-time employees are white, over 98 per cent of the musical examples in our textbooks were written by white authors, and 100 per cent of the music theorists discussed in typical classrooms for core classes are white. Philip Ewell, ‘Music Theory and the White Racial Frame’, *Music Theory Online* 26/2 (September 2020), 3.1–3.2, <https://mtosmt.org/issues/mto.20.26.2/mto.20.26.2.ewell.html>; Society for Music Theory, ‘SMT Demographics’, <https://societymusictheory.org/administration/demographics>.

15 Ewell, ‘Music Theory and the White Racial Frame’, 6.2. I do not mean to suggest that these committees do not do valuable work. SMT’s Committee on Race and Ethnicity, for example, sponsors important lectures, travel grants, and hosts a set of valuable online resources. See <http://diversity.societymusictheory.org/pedagogy/>.

16 See in the following in the *Journal of Schenkerian Studies* 12 (2019): David Beach, ‘Schenker–Racism–Context’; Timothy L. Jackson, ‘A Preliminary Response to Ewell’; and Anonymous, ‘An Anonymous Response to Philip Ewell’.

17 For a good overview of the issue’s most egregious statements, as well as a summary of some of Ewell’s main arguments, see Megan L. Lavengood, ‘Journal of Schenkerian Studies: Proving the Point’, blog post, 27 July 2020, <https://meganlavengood.com/2020/07/27/journal-of-schenkerian-studies-proving-the-point>. The SMT Executive Board issued a statement condemning the *JSS* issue, stating that ‘the conception and execution of this symposium failed to meet the ethical, professional, and scholarly standards of our discipline . . . the journal’s advisory board did not subject submissions to the normal processes of peer review, published an anonymously authored contribution, and did not invite Ewell to respond in a symposium of essays that discussed his own work. Such behaviors are silencing, designed to exclude and to replicate a culture of whiteness. These are examples of professional misconduct, which in this case enables overtly racist behavior’. See Society for Music Theory, ‘Executive Board Response to Essays in The Journal of Schenkerian Studies Vol. 12’, <https://societymusictheory.org/announcement/executive-board-response-journal-schenkerian-studies-vol-12-2020-07>.

18 One of the most influential scholars in the field has been Indiana University professor Kyle Adams, whose *Music Theory Online* articles analyzing rap are among the journal’s most viewed and downloaded of all time. Adams also serves as Associate Editor of *Music Theory Spectrum*, the flagship journal of the Society for Music Theory and is therefore essentially SMT’s – and by extension, US music theory’s – gatekeeper when it comes to hip-hop. See Kyle Adams,



students an opportunity to closely examine musical forms that many theorists once considered unworthy of analysis. At the same time, however, the discipline's white racial frame has ensured that these conversations consist largely of white men talking to other white men.

This statement should not be surprising or controversial. As Ewell notes, music theory remains a field overrepresented by white men. The privileging of Western classical music, enforced by accrediting bodies such as the National Association of Schools of Music (NASM), means that gaining entrance into MA and PhD programmes in music theory and musicology is most often predicated on students' familiarity with and expertise in Western classical music. Most musicology and theory departments are housed within academic units that regard instruction in classical music performance as their main purpose. Graduate students are therefore expected to serve as teaching assistants in an undergraduate curriculum in history, theory, and musicianship that centres Western classical music and pays little, if any, attention to hip-hop music, the ideas of Black scholars, or issues related to racial justice. Elsewhere, Ewell points out that PhD programmes in music theory routinely require core seminars – such as history of music theory, Schenkerian analysis, and post-tonal analysis – that focus exclusively on the work of white males.<sup>19</sup> Similarly, in many PhD programmes in musicology, comprehensive exams focus almost single-mindedly on the history and historiography of Western classical music, and foreign language requirements continue to prioritize German, French, and Italian. In other words, *earning the privilege to write about Black music as a music theorist or musicologist paradoxically requires possessing greater familiarity with the music and ideas of white men.*

This system allows for new knowledge to be generated about Black music without a corresponding inclusion of Black voices. The numerous required seminars devoted to Western music theory, history, and analysis reinforce the expectation that even research on hip-hop should be accountable, first and foremost, to other white music theory scholars. The problem is not that theorists' analyses of hip-hop are wrong per se. Rather, it is that the discipline in which they are trained and in which they seek employment encourages them to ignore the

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<sup>19</sup> 'Aspects of the Music/Text Relationship in Rap', *Music Theory Online* 14/2 (May 2008), <https://mtosmt.org/issues/mto.08.14.2/mto.08.14.2.adams.html>; Kyle Adams, 'On the Metrical Techniques of Flow in Rap Music', *Music Theory Online* 15/5 (October 2009), <https://mtosmt.org/issues/mto.09.15.5/mto.09.15.5.adams.php>; Kyle Adams, 'Playing with Beats and Playing with Cats: Meow the Jewels, Remixes, and Reinterpretations', *Music Theory Online* 22/3 (September 2016), <https://mtosmt.org/issues/mto.16.22.3/mto.16.22.3.adams.html>; Kyle Adams, 'Harmonic, Syntactic, and Motivic Parameters of Phrase in Hip Hop', *Music Theory Online* 26/2 (September 2020), <https://mtosmt.org/issues/mto.20.26.2/mto.20.26.2.adams.html>. Other theorists who have written about hip-hop include Robert Komanićki, 'Analyzing Collaborative Flow in Rap Music', *Music Theory Online* 23/4 (December 2017), <https://mtosmt.org/issues/mto.17.23.4/mto.17.23.4.komanićki.html>; Mitchell Ohriner, 'Metric Ambiguity and Flow in Rap Music: A Corpus-Assisted Study of Outkast's "Mainstream" (1996)', *Empirical Music Review* 11/2 (2016), <https://emusicology.org/article/view/4896>; Mitchell Ohriner, 'Analysing the Pitch Content of the Rapping Voice', *Journal of New Music Research* 48/5 (2019), [www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/09298215.2019.1609525](http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/09298215.2019.1609525); Ben Duinker, 'Good Things Come In Threes: Triplet Flow in Recent Hip Hop Music', *Popular Music* 38/3 (October 2019).  
 19 Philip Ewell, 'Race, Gender, and Their Intersection in Music Theory', *Music Theory's White Racial Frame: Confronting Racism and Sexism in American Music Theory*, blog post, 10 April 2020, <https://musictheoryswhiteracialframe.wordpress.com/2020/04/10/racism-sexism-and-their-intersection-in-music-theory/>.

work of Black scholars in favour of analytical rigour. I am concerned about the ways that scholars writing about hip-hop from music theory backgrounds are therefore inclined to create their own separate discourse about hip-hop rather than to seek ways of engaging Black voices outside their discipline. Budding theorists are expected to prioritize the work of established leaders in their discipline – overwhelmingly white male scholars who focus strictly on abstract parameters of sound – while ignoring social, political, or historical factors relevant to hip-hop’s intersectional politics of race.

As Kimberlé Crenshaw and other critical race scholars explain, colourblindness in academia ‘reproduces its own appeal by limiting the means by which countervailing information is legitimately produced’.<sup>20</sup> In music theory, this means rewarding work that focuses on formal relationships (i.e., ‘the music itself’). This commitment to insights drawn from the rigorous study of musical texts forms the basis for how knowledge is generated in the field, it perpetuates the circular logic that particular musical objects are worthy of study because they hold up under aesthetic scrutiny, and it reinforces the idea that a musical work’s aesthetic significance can be defined by its formal properties alone.

Building on the critical insights of musicologist Joseph Kerman, Guthrie Ramsey, Jr has written about jazz’s incorporation into the academy, noting that ‘one of the goals of formal analysis – to expose organic unity – is a musical value in which few major jazz musicians have expressed much interest’, but one that has allowed music scholars to legitimize new works by equating them aesthetically with Western art music.<sup>21</sup> Ramsey’s point is not that jazz musicians were unconcerned about aesthetics, but that they did not seem preoccupied with the terms that musicologists used to talk about their work. At present, a similar interest in hip-hop’s formal properties enables rap music to become a legitimate area of study without a corresponding demand that theorists engage voices from outside the discipline, including those of musicians themselves, that might shed light on hip-hop’s cultural, political, and of course musical dimensions.

Musicologists, most notably Susan McClary, have long criticized music theory’s orientation towards the music itself.<sup>22</sup> And she has warned theorists of the false binary between ‘objective’ and ‘subjective’ that led many to ignore ‘music’s relationships with human experience and cultural history’.<sup>23</sup> But the growth of hip-hop as an object of study in a field dominated by white men provides a new window into how the discipline’s formalist commitments constitute a politics of race. Philosophers, critical of their own discipline’s white male bias, have coined the phrase ‘epistemology of ignorance’ to describe the practice of pursuing knowledge while excluding, as beyond its purview, the lived experiences and concerns of women, racial

20 Kimberlé Crenshaw, Luke Harris, George Lipsitz, and Daniel Martinez HoSang, eds., *Seeing Race Again: Countering Colorblindness Across the Disciplines* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2019), xiii.

21 Guthrie Ramsey, Jr, *The Amazing Bud Powell: Black Genius, Jazz History, and the Challenge of Bebop* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2013), 19.

22 Susan McClary, *Conventional Wisdom: The Content of Musical Form* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2000).

23 Susan McClary, ‘In Praise of Contingency: The Power and Limits of Theory’, *Music Theory Online* 16/1 (January 2010), <https://mtosmt.org/issues/mto.10.16.1/mto.10.16.1.mcclary.html>.



minorities, LGBTQ people, and others unable or unwilling to adopt the privileged position of a white hetero-male subject.<sup>24</sup> As philosopher and popular music scholar Robin James notes, by separating analysis from history and ethnography, music theory (much like modern analytic philosophy) naturalizes the common-sense intuitions of the most privileged members of society as ‘objective’ knowledge.<sup>25</sup> In music theory, disciplinary authority itself derives from quasi-scientific methods that limit research goals to modelling how music ‘works’ for ideal (white, male) listeners. Music theorists’ focus on formal relationships might enable a level of analytic detail not found in the work of other scholars, but it does so at the expense of entire worlds of knowledge about what makes hip-hop music such a vital and important part of our contemporary world.<sup>26</sup> Sheltered from the many conversations already underway about rap’s social, political, and artistic dimensions, music departments offer the safest spaces on campus for white men to talk about rap.

These practices silence the voices of Black scholars, even those who have contributed theoretical arguments about hip-hop music. Tricia Rose’s *Black Noise: Rap Music and Black Culture in Contemporary America*, published in 1994, devotes an entire chapter to exploring hip-hop’s sonic properties.<sup>27</sup> In this aptly titled book, which continues to stand as one of the best academic treatments of the genre, Rose explores rap music’s potential to serve as a form of resistance. The ‘noise’ of her title has multiple referents: the white majority dismissing the music as such; the hip-hop community celebrating its ability to interfere with the status quo; and the creative, non-traditional approaches to music-making adopted by its producers. Her title also implies the centrality of sound in figuring Blackness, and Rose devotes a fair amount of space to explicating the Black cultural priorities informing the music’s production. In particular, she calls attention to repetition, which unites rap with other Afro-diasporic groove-based forms, including funk and reggae, and differentiates it from Western classical music’s goal-directed drive. She contrasts rhythm in Western classical music, which serves to support the way tonal structures are organized teleologically, to the way rhythm functions as a structural element in hip-hop beats through repetition.<sup>28</sup>

Two decades later, in a chapter devoted to the musical analysis of rap in *The Cambridge Companion to Hip-Hop*, white music theorist Kyle Adams repeated these observations about rhythm and repetition and compared Western classical music with rap, but he did

24 Robin James, ‘What We Can Learn About Philosophy’s Diversity Problems by Comparing Ourselves to Music Theory’, *It’s Her Factory*, blog post, 2 October 2014, [www.its-her-factory.com/2014/10/what-we-can-learn-about-philosophy-diversity-problems-by-comparing-ourselves-to-music-theory/](http://www.its-her-factory.com/2014/10/what-we-can-learn-about-philosophy-diversity-problems-by-comparing-ourselves-to-music-theory/).

25 James, ‘What We Can Learn About Philosophy’s Diversity Problems’.

26 Philip Ewell makes a parallel argument, charging that music theory disguises racial exclusivity as scientific objectivity: ‘Still another part of the drive to scientificize music analysis in the U.S. in the twentieth century represents an effort to shore up whiteness in music theory’s white frame since this scientification insulates whiteness from potential criticism’. Philip Ewell, ‘Beethoven Was an Above Average Composer – Let’s Leave It at That’, *Music Theory’s White Racial Frame: Confronting Racism and Sexism in American Music Theory*, blog post, 24 April 2020, <https://musictheoryswhiteracialframe.wordpress.com/2020/04/24/beethoven-was-an-above-average-composer-lets-leave-it-at-that/>.

27 Tricia Rose, *Black Noise: Rap Music and Black Culture in Contemporary America* (Hanover, NH: Wesleyan University Press, 1994), 62–97.

28 Rose, *Black Noise*, 68–9.

so without citing Rose.<sup>29</sup> This omission speaks to the way citational practices silence and exclude Black women scholars because they are not considered theorists.<sup>30</sup> As Ewell notes, what counts as theory and who counts as theorists are not questions that can be easily disentangled from the discipline's history of racial exclusion. Drawing on Sara Ahmed's critique of cultural theory, Ewell discusses how 'citational chains' become ways of marginalizing non-white and female voices.<sup>31</sup> Since Rose is not known as a music theorist in a strict disciplinary sense, and because she is a woman of colour writing about issues of race, her work lies beyond those sources in need of consultation, citation, and deference. In his chapter, for example, Adams defines the boundaries of the field as a commitment to analytical approaches in 'the usual-music-theoretical sense of manipulating notes, rhythms, and so forth, in order to reveal something about the inner workings of a piece of music'.<sup>32</sup> By limiting their scope of study to hip-hop's 'inner workings', Adams and other music theorists exclude perspectives from interdisciplinary studies that might challenge or complicate their analyses, upholding the field's racially exclusive status quo even as they incorporate Black music.

I do not mean to suggest that the problems I have been discussing can be resolved simply by adding a few footnotes.<sup>33</sup> But I chose to include this example because it raises important epistemological questions for hip-hop studies in music theory and musicology. Whose music and methods of analysis deserve attention? Who counts as a theorist, musicologist, or composer? From where do legitimate conversations about music originate, and whose purposes do they serve? Rose's work should be essential to music theorists because she *theorizes* rap music. The observations she makes about hip-hop aesthetics are intimately tied to post-industrialism, US racial and sexual politics, and various media and institutional responses to Black culture, topics that should be relevant to anyone attempting to analyse rap music. Rather than excluding such concerns, theorists should imagine how analyses of hip-hop would look if Rose and other women of colour were considered foundational sources.<sup>34</sup>

29 Kyle Adams, 'The Musical Analysis of Hip-Hop', in *The Cambridge Companion to Hip-Hop*, ed. Justin Williams (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 118–19.

30 In fact, Christen A. Smith, Associate Professor of Anthropology and African and African Diaspora Studies at The University of Texas at Austin, created a Twitter account (@citeBlackwomen) devoted to calling attention to this problem and encouraging scholars to remedy it.

31 'Some work becomes theory because it refers to other work that is known as theory. A citational chain is created around theory: you become a theorist by citing other theorists that cite other theorists'. Sara Ahmed as quoted in Ewell, 'Beethoven Was an Above Average Composer'.

32 Adams, 'The Musical Analysis of Hip Hop', n19, 133–4.

33 Although doing so certainly does not hurt.

34 There are examples of music theorists attempting to integrate black culture and politics into their analyses, including a 2019 *Music Theory Online* forum on Kendrick Lamar's album *To Pimp A Butterfly*. Despite the efforts of these authors, many of which cite Tricia Rose and other black scholars, the rigorous formalism of such work seems destined to ensure that it remains relevant mainly to other music theorists. See the following articles in *Music Theory Online* 25/1 (March 2019), [www.mtosmt.org/issues/mto.19.25.1/toc.25.1.html](http://www.mtosmt.org/issues/mto.19.25.1/toc.25.1.html): Robin Attas, 'Music Theory as Social Justice: Pedagogical Applications of Kendrick Lamar's *To Pimp A Butterfly*'; Noriko Manabe, 'We Gon' Be Alright? The Ambiguities of Kendrick Lamar's Protest Anthem'; Mitchell M. Ohriner, 'Lyric, Rhythm, and Non-alignment in the Second Verse of Kendrick Lamar's "Momma"'; John Mattessich, 'This Flow Ain't Free: Generative Elements in Kendrick Lamar's

While considering these challenges, theorists and musicologists should also think carefully about how gender and sexuality intersect with race. For example, Black women in hip-hop have been marginalized not only as scholars but also as practitioners. Even a cursory glance at recent books and articles on rap make clear the overwhelming focus on heterosexual, cis-gender Black men, and I fear that most college courses on hip-hop history fail to include enough music by women and queer artists. We would do well to engage the work of scholars who have insisted on the inclusion of women and LGBTQ artists in hip-hop historiography, including Kyra Gaunt, Lauron Kehrer, Cheryl Keyes, Oneka LaBennett, Gwendolyn Pough, and Shanté Smalls, among others.<sup>35</sup> Without such perspectives, we will be in danger of reinforcing problematic narratives and introducing new exclusionary canons in place of old ones.<sup>36</sup>

### The challenge of significant difference

I have raised these concerns about music theory and hip-hop to encourage all music scholars to think more deeply about how anti-Blackness is embedded in our research and teaching. Although musicologists writing about hip-hop might have a better track record of engaging interdisciplinary scholarship and the work of Black scholars, the truth is that musicologists and music theorists most often work together within the same departments that uphold a white-centred culture and curriculum. One of the biggest questions facing musicology and music theory is whether the growing prominence of hip-hop as a legitimate area of study will transform the disciplines and institutions within which we work, or will it reinforce existing exclusionary practices?

In his 2001 article ‘Who Hears Here? Black Music, Critical Bias, and the Musicological Skin Trade’, Guthrie Ramsey, Jr expresses his concern that, without the participation of African American scholars and the critical perspectives they bring to the table, musicological studies of Black music will remain locked in a familiar pattern. Quoting the words of literary scholar Ann duCille, Ramsey suggests that Black music ‘is more easily intellectualized (and canonized) when transferred from the danger of lived Black experience to the safety of white

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*To Pimp A Butterfly*’; and James Bungert, “‘I got a bone to pick’”: Formal Ambivalence and Double-Consciousness in Kendrick Lamar’s “King Kunta””.

35 See Kyra Gaunt, *The Games Black Girls Play: Learning the Ropes from Double-Dutch to Hip Hop* (New York: New York University Press, 2006); Lauron Kehrer, ‘A Love Song for All of Us?: Macklemore’s “Same Love” and the Myth of Black Homophobia’, *Journal of the Society for American Music* 12/4 (2018); Cheryl Keyes, *Rap Music and Street Consciousness* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2004); Oneka LaBennett, ‘Histories and “Her Stories” from the Bronx: Excavating Hidden Hip Hop Narratives’, *African Americans in New York Life and History* 33/2 (July 2009); Gwendolyn Pough, *Check It While I Wreck It: Black Womanhood, Hip-Hop Culture, and the Public Sphere* (Lebanon, NH: Northeastern University Press, 2004); and Shanté Smalls, ‘Queer Hip-Hop: A Brief Historiography’ in *The Oxford Handbook of Music and Queerness*, ed. Fred Everett Maus and Sheila Whiteley (New York: Oxford University Press, 2018).

36 I am grateful to reviewers of my book *Sounding Race in Rap Songs* who helped me to think more carefully about intersectional politics in hip-hop scholarship. See Tracy McMullen, ‘Review of *Sounding Race in Rap Songs*’, *Current Musicology* 99–100 (Spring/Fall 2016); and Tamar Faber, ‘Review of *Sounding Race in Rap Songs*’, *Global Hip Hop Studies* 1/1 (2020).

metaphor, when you can have that “signifying Black difference” without the difference of significant Blackness’.<sup>37</sup> Those of us engaged in bringing hip-hop into music departments should be asking how our modes of hearing, writing, and interpreting might be generating knowledge about Black music while simultaneously excluding Black people.

In his essay on the racial foundations of US popular music and musicology, Matthew Morrison emphasizes the regimes of unequal power dating back to chattel slavery that have influenced the representation of Black music. He provocatively argues that musicology’s ongoing lack of diversity and hesitancy around questions of race are rooted in foundational dynamics that separated US popular music in the nineteenth century from Western classical traditions. Confronting racial inequality both in popular music studies and in musicology, therefore, requires attending to ‘the complexities of music making within unjust societal structures’.<sup>38</sup> Morrison’s call for a more inclusive version of musicology is especially salient for non-Black hip-hop scholars, even those like me who write explicitly about race.

My own path to becoming a professor who teaches and researches hip-hop was cleared by the disenfranchisement of Black people. There is no other explanation for the scarcity of Black musicians and historians in music departments across the country. In fact, the exclusion of Black music and Black scholars from musicology has made it easier for me to be regarded as an ‘expert’. As the first tenure-track musicologist of colour to be hired in the two departments where I have worked, I am certain that my presence has helped give the impression of greater diversity without increasing the presence of Black faculty members. In a 2020 Facebook post responding to the Black Lives Matter movement’s call to address systemic racism, Indian American jazz pianist, composer, and Harvard music professor Vijay Iyer eloquently summed up the problem:

It’s no secret that I, an Indian American, have accumulated significant power in a field of music created by Black American music-makers. This power has been conferred on me primarily by white-run systems . . . [and] my privilege has operated in such a way to allow me, as a ‘non-Black person of color,’ to benefit from tokenism, to assuage white guilt with my presence, and even to become, to my dismay, a de facto spokesperson for Black culture. This is a position that many Asian Americans have come to occupy in the corridors of power, in the arts world, academia, government, media, and industry. We might show up thinking that we are part of a change, but then we very often become a mitigating or mediating presence, merely enabling the continued workings of white supremacy and anti-Blackness. We too often let ourselves become ‘the only brown person in the room’.<sup>39</sup>

37 Ann duCille, as quoted in Guthrie Ramsey, Jr, ‘Who Hears Here? Black Music, Critical Bias, and the Musicological Skin Trade’, *The Musical Quarterly* 85/1 (Spring 2001), 39.

38 Matthew D. Morrison, ‘Race, Blacksound, and the (Re)Making of Musicological Discourse’, *Journal of the American Musicological Society* 72/3 (2019), 817.

39 Vijay Iyer, ‘It’s No Secret That I, an Indian American, Have Accumulated Significant Power in a Field of Music Created by Black American Music-Makers’, *Facebook*, 28 June 2020, [www.facebook.com/sonocentric/posts/10158178031891041](https://www.facebook.com/sonocentric/posts/10158178031891041).

In a similar way, new courses on hip-hop might help departments achieve the look of musical diversity without fundamentally altering core practices. As Angela Y. Davis has written about diversity efforts in academia, 'Progressive academics have waged a battle for multicultural representation in opposition to the defenders of a monolithic notion of education that privileges a white Western intellectual tradition'.<sup>40</sup> However, she cautions, 'we sometimes ignore the historical and political context within which these debates and campaigns have taken shape'. In other words, although fighting for the inclusion of hip-hop in schools of music is a step in the right direction, if we do not simultaneously challenge institutional and disciplinary norms, hip-hop's presence will be managed in ways that preserve a racist status quo. Thus, it is imperative for musicologists and theorists to work together and to align themselves with critical race scholars and activists seeking structural change. As Khalil Saucier and Tyron Woods exclaim in no uncertain terms: 'hip hop studies will remain utterly wretched unless it comes to terms with the structure of gratuitous violence in which it exists'.<sup>41</sup>

Black folklorist Langston Collin Wilkins offers an incisive analysis of how Black culture is incorporated into white-controlled academic and non-profit organizations, and his reflections on this topic are worth quoting at length:

Personally, I find it pretty wild that engaging Black culture too often involves strategically navigating whiteness. We operate in a system where white gatekeepers present Black culture for the white gaze.

Black cultural spaces exist in isolation until they produce something that white people desire. White people rarely enter them until there is something they want to enjoy and eventually control. They exploit structural inequalities by using their capital, connections and other resources (like our grants/philanthropic culture) to control artists and art forms. They become gatekeepers. Sometimes they're scholars, experts, agents, managers, documentarians or non-profit heads. Access goes through them. They create organizations for these traditions and then only hire other white people. Imagine being black and having to navigate white folks to engage something that emerged from your community. Imagine some white guy vetting you for access to your kinfolk.

This is a process of cultural extraction. White gatekeepers use their resources to present these Black traditions to monied white audiences. They present performances, show-cases and symposium in spaces far removed from the Black community. And, it's not that there's a lack of spaces in the Black community. It's because the cultural sector is dependent on the white gaze. The goal is to bring the margins to the mainstream because the mainstream won't go to the margins.

The processes of white gatekeeping and cultural extraction perpetuate severe inequalities. Sure, these white-led organizations may have diverse programming, but it means

<sup>40</sup> Davis, 'Gender, Class, and Multiculturalism', 42.

<sup>41</sup> Saucier and Woods, 'Hip Hop Studies in Black', 285.

very little to me if Black folks (and other people of color) have little access to it. Black-led organizations are resilient, but ‘bending but not breaking’ is woefully unhealthy. Black culture workers struggle to find any sort of balance between cultural respect, personal fulfillment and financial stability.

It is a dirty structure that needs to be destroyed and rebuilt.<sup>42</sup>

What would it mean for those of us who have established ourselves in music departments to introduce forms of significant difference that challenge the patterns of exclusion keeping musicology and music theory so white? One way that popular music scholars, especially those with tenure, can help rebuild our disciplines is to help broaden what is considered significant (i.e., tenure-worthy) scholarship. Musicologist Mark Katz, who has created opportunities for hip-hop DJs, MCs, and producers to teach in the University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill’s music department, writes about how universities need to treat local artists better. Too often, he explains, we invite them to campus without paying them, and no matter how qualified they are, it is nearly impossible for them to teach as official faculty members due to institutional guidelines about who can be listed as instructors of record. ‘Why is having a master’s degree sufficient to teach hip-hop, but having Grammys and platinum records and decades of relevant experience is not?’<sup>43</sup> As Katz suggests, one way of transforming our discipline is through forging truly collaborative and respectful relationships with the people who make the music we are so intent on studying.<sup>44</sup>

In an article about his experiences bringing Afro-Puerto Rican bomba – a close relative of hip-hop culture – to the University of Washington’s School of Music, ethnomusicologist Shannon Dudley offers further insight into how fostering new relationships with musical communities can help transform academic enterprises. As Dudley notes, bomba’s combination of music, dance, poetry, community building, and social activism necessitates a rethinking of traditional disciplinary boundaries and desired outcomes.<sup>45</sup> He outlines the ways in which bomba’s ‘community music’ orientation offers a more inclusive alternative to the Western classical world’s more individualistic emphasis. Drawing on the work of Chicana artista musician and feminist music theorist Martha Gonzalez, who has taken a similar approach to incorporating Fandango into college settings, Dudley encourages music programmes to build participatory music experience into degree requirements, hire visiting

42 Langston Collin Wilkins, ‘On White Gatekeepers’, *Street Folk*, blog post, 5 July 2020, <https://streetfolk.org/2020/07/05/on-white-gatekeepers>; Wilkins’s post shares many similarities with an essay penned one month earlier by a black ethnomusicologist who left academia in part due to her frustration with racist and colonialist practices. See Danielle Brown, ‘An Open Letter About Racism in Music Studies: Especially Ethnomusicology and Music Education’, *My People Tell Stories*, blog post, 12 June 2020, [www.mypeopletellstories.com/blog/open-letter](http://www.mypeopletellstories.com/blog/open-letter).

43 Mark Katz, ‘2040 Vision: What Will Arts Education Look Like in the Triangle 20 Years From Now?’ *Indy Week*, 31 December 2019, <https://indyweek.com/news/northcarolina/2040-vision-triangle-arts-education/>.

44 A good example of such collaboration (alas, outside a music department) is Duke University Professor Mark Anthony Neal’s team-taught course with hip-hop producer 9th Wonder. See *Come Hear North Carolina*, ‘Revisiting Duke University’s History of Hip-Hop Course’, 7 April 2019, [www.ncarts.org/comehearnc/365-days-music/revisiting-duke-universitys-history-hip-hop-course](http://www.ncarts.org/comehearnc/365-days-music/revisiting-duke-universitys-history-hip-hop-course).

45 Shannon Dudley, ‘Bomba Goes to College – How Is That Working Out?’ *Centro Journal* 31/11 (Summer 2019), 199.



artists, partner with community artists and groups, and collaborate more with other disciplines and academic units.<sup>46</sup> At the same time, he recognizes the importance of documenting the impact that such activities have on student learning and community engagement in order to revise the hiring and promotion criteria to better support faculty who want to do collaborative community-based work.<sup>47</sup>

These recommendations about academic standards and expectations for faculty are key. Many junior faculty and graduate students want to help create change but feel pressure to demonstrate their accomplishments in ways that are legible to the experts who confer degrees, accept articles for publication, and award tenure. As Ramsey notes, ‘While it may be true that the leaderships and the rank and file of our professional music societies have remained committed to the ideals of cultural diversity, true diversity will mean a change in what counts as valuable knowledge in our professional discourses. New criticisms demand new attitudes.’<sup>48</sup>

One of the best examples of what it might mean for hip-hop to bring new attitudes and new forms of valuable knowledge into music departments is the work of A. D. Carson, assistant professor of hip-hop and the Global South at the University of Virginia. Carson gained notoriety in 2017 after completing a PhD in rhetoric at Clemson University by writing and recording a rap album in place of a traditional dissertation.<sup>49</sup> Not only did this innovative decision become the subject of social media controversy, but also Carson’s lyrics for one track, ‘See the Stripes’, which invoked Clemson University’s Tiger mascot to highlight aspects of the school’s history involving slavery, sharecropping, and convict labour, set off a backlash that brought the then-PhD candidate hate mail and even death threats.<sup>50</sup>

Since filing his dissertation and beginning his position within UVA’s music department, Carson has released two volumes of a new project entitled *Sleepwalking*. Among other themes, the series grapples with questions of racism and white supremacy. Volume 2, for example, responded directly to the ‘summer of hate’ in Charlottesville 2017, where he moved immediately before the violence of 11–12 August’s Unite the Right Rally. On ‘Kill Whitey’, Carson declares his right to stand his ground in self-defence. Using both the terms ‘whitey’ and the N-word to refer to white supremacy, Carson’s play with language offers listeners the chance to reflect on a number of double-standards surrounding race, language, and violence.<sup>51</sup> Volume 3 of *Sleepwalking*, subtitled *i used to love to dream*, is rooted in Carson’s more recent experiences at UVA where his teaching responsibilities include running the Rap Lab where students can work on writing and recording their own hip-hop tracks. In

46 Martha Gonzalez, *Chican@ Artivistas: Music, Community, and Transborder Tactics in East Los Angeles* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2020).

47 Dudley, ‘Bomba Goes to College’, 220.

48 Ramsey, ‘Who Hears Here?’ 40.

49 A. D. Carson, *Owning My Masters: The Rhetorics of Rhymes & Revolutions* (digital album), *bandcamp.com*, 2017, <https://aydeethegreat.bandcamp.com/album/owning-my-masters-the-rhetorics-of-rhymes-revolutions>.

50 Caroline Newman, ‘Meet A.D. Carson, UVA’s Professor of Hip-Hop’, *UVA Today*, 22 June 2017, <https://news.virginia.edu/content/meet-ad-carson-uvas-professor-hip-hop>.

51 A. D. Carson, ‘Kill Whitey’, on *Sleepwalking 2 [a mixtap/e/essay | OTR]* (digital album), *bandcamp.com*, 2018, <https://aydeethegreat.bandcamp.com/album/sleepwalking-2>.

this album, Carson reflects on his upbringing in Decatur, Illinois and grapples with some of the lingering regrets he has about leaving his community to join the ranks of academia. He asks listeners to consider his conflicted feelings about being a ‘hip-hop professor’ in world that continues to treat Black people with hostility, probing the contradictions of being a Black artist/scholar in a predominantly white institution.<sup>52</sup>

Although rendered in deeply personal terms, the questions that Carson grapples with have relevance for all hip-hop scholars, especially those of us working in departments of music. As he explains, “The title of the series is borrowed from the narrator of Ralph Ellison’s *Invisible Man*, who, in the course of describing his acceptance of his “invisible” identity observes, “you’re constantly being bumped against by those of poor vision. Or again, you often doubt if you really exist”.<sup>53</sup> In one sense, those of us who research and teach popular music in music departments encounter sleepwalkers every day. Usually, we remain invisible to them, marginal to the daily operation of our respective institutions, which prioritize conservatory-style education in classical music. But do something to rouse a sleepwalker from their dream of a world where the only thing that really matters is the canon of white male composers and theorists, and you might be in for an unpleasant surprise. As Carson, still quoting Ellison, suggests: ‘I remember that I am invisible and walk softly so as not to awaken the sleeping ones. Sometimes it is best not to awaken them; there are few things in the world as dangerous as sleepwalkers.’<sup>54</sup>

By being the first person to earn a PhD by writing and recording hip-hop music, Carson has already awakened his share of sleepwalkers. As a tenure-track assistant professor in a music department, he and his colleagues at UVA are challenging the academic system to accept hip-hop music not simply as an object of study but as creative, scholarly labour, which has transformative implications for the institution. *i used to love to dream*, for example, is published through the University of Michigan Press and is the first ever peer-reviewed rap album. Those of us who teach and research popular music, especially hip-hop, need to ask how often we have taken similar risks. How much space have we created for significant difference in the field? Or, have we mostly avoided bumping into our colleagues in ways that might awaken them and upset the status quo?

At the same time, Carson deliberately invokes Ellison’s words in his liner notes to highlight an uncertainty that he feels about whether he sees himself or others as ‘the sleeping ones’. As he pointed out to me when I shared a draft of this contribution:

Principally, I think this is important because the narrator of *The Invisible Man* is unreliable. I believe I’m likely as unreliable because of the position I [now] occupy in relation to hip-hop. Making music on the tenure-track at UVA is a long way from making music on the block back in Decatur for fun, or trying to get a record

52 A. D. Carson, *Sleepwalking 3: I Used To Love To Dream* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2020), [www.fulcrum.org/concern/monographs/m900nw52n?locale=en](http://www.fulcrum.org/concern/monographs/m900nw52n?locale=en).

53 Carson, *Sleepwalking 3*.

54 Carson, *Sleepwalking 3*.

deal or book shows. So those power dynamics, which may be more simply described as economic, cannot be ignored.<sup>55</sup>

For non-Black scholars making careers writing and teaching about Black music, these power dynamics are even more salient. Just as Carson recognizes the difference between making hip-hop in the academy and making it ‘on the block’, musicologists and theorists that write about hip-hop need to spend more time thinking about whether our teaching, scholarship, and service contribute to positive change where we work or simply allow us to get ahead by using Black culture.

### Concluding thoughts

The opportunity to bring hip-hop into music departments should be a chance to move in new and bold directions. Musicologists and music theorists, especially those of us with tenure, should ask how we can be proactively involved in initiatives that offer more inclusive ideas about what counts as essential knowledge and essential music practices. It is up to us to question, critique, and find ways to depart from disciplinary norms that silence the voices of the very communities whose music we want to study. At the very least, we should avoid assuming that our work on hip-hop is inherently progressive. As members of conservative institutions that remain narrowly fixated on Western classical music, it might be tempting to imagine ourselves as a revolutionary vanguard whose job it is to prove to sceptical colleagues and administrators that hip-hop is, in fact, complex and deserving of academic attention. But the truth is that hip-hop has never required our validation, or our attention. What hip-hop needs from us is not legitimacy, but action.

Restorative justice in music departments means identifying and dismantling disciplinary practices that reinforce and perpetuate racial exclusion. For academic areas such as musicology and music theory, this means tearing down and rebuilding a curriculum that has long centred the perspectives of white men. We will know we are making progress when our scholarship engages Black voices and abandons race-neutral methodologies, when we no longer have all-white panels at our conferences, when music departments stop using Black music to increase student enrolments while devoting the lion’s share of resources to classical music instruction, and when the lecture slides we created for our hip-hop classes after the Ferguson uprising are no longer so damn relevant.

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<sup>55</sup> A. D. Carson, email to the author, 25 May 2020.

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