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UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA SAN DIEGO

To Hip-Hop or Not: Perceptions of Race, Genre, History, and Pedagogy in the African-American  
Bandworld

A Dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the requirements  
for the degree Doctor of Philosophy

in

Music

by

Kevin P. Green

Committee in charge:

Professor Sarah Hankins, Chair  
Professor David Borgo  
Professor Amy Cimini  
Professor Brian Cross  
Professor Anthony Davis

2023

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University of California San Diego

2023

## **DEDICATION**

For my father, Wilmer Green. For my brother, Wilmer Green Jr. For my mother, Mary Green. Ma and Wil, I miss both of you every day.

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## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I am trying to find the words to thank everybody, but I am at a loss. What can you really say to a group of people that changed your life during a time of struggle? My matriculation at UC San Diego was not just about academic goals; it was about a complete shift in trajectory, mainly due to my brother's death. I was happy teaching music in Brooklyn at the time of his passing, but I felt I needed to return to California after that tragic event. He was my anchor, as was my mother. Her passing during this program still remains difficult.

Realistically, my family is big and each one of them deserves a paragraph for me to express my gratitude. My extended family of aunts, uncles, and cousins were helpful with this. I have called my cousin, known professionally as Dr. Brice, repeatedly because as a professor at Texas Southern University, he is where I'm trying to get to. I do thank my Aunt Nancy and Cousin Jessica for attending both my graduation and dissertation defense.

I could thank Doc Hankins and Cimini separately, but on their own, and in tandem, they guided and led me through this journey with wit, knowledge, and compassion, and were always available to assist me with both academic and personal situations. With the addition of Doc Leslie-Santana to our community, the duo became a power trio, and again they showed extreme capability as professionals and as people. Doc Borgo and Prof. Davis have continued to feed the player and sometime composer. I'm referring to me as a working jazz musician who only wants to arrange and play charts, but they have helped me grow as a scholar as well. I see the music through a much wider lens than I did before because of them. Brian "B+" Cross was there at the beginning of my post-high school journey. His love of music and culture knows no limits and I am honored to have him on my committee. Doc Pasler and Doc Guy are formidable and helped me learn the tradition of scholarly work in music. King Britt has been a sounding board and

source of inspiration. His Blacktronika class has been a revelation, and I was fortunate to be a member of 5Hz, the performative extension of the concept. Paul – thanks for the pandemic playing sessions. They helped more than I let on. I also thank Dr. Anthony Burr for allowing me to give a guest lecture in his Hip-Hop history class. He saw the connections as I did between show-style bands and Hip-Hop, and my ideas for this dissertation took root at that time. It would be unthinkable for me to leave out Dr. Susan Thomas and Dr. Jean Kidula, who were both at University of Georgia during my false start. They sent me forward with all the well wishes I could hope for when they saw I needed to leave.

Completing ethnographic work is hard, and without contributions from others, it would have been impossible. To my interlocutors: James Hurt, Charlie Braxton, Claire Milburn, Rae’Kwon Bostic, Jalessa Smith, Gerard Howard, Terrance Bacon, Chesteron Frye, Trenton Hunter, Maurice LeFlore, Jaylon Taylor, Kendrick Williams, Janiya A. Charlton, Marie A. Douglas, Krystain Coleman, Samserai Cardenas, Evan Garner, Tony Morgan, and Kelvin Washington – your input was invaluable. Access to some of these individuals and groups would have been impossible if not for the logistic work of many people: Dr. Shelby Chipman and Dr. Nicholas Thomas at Florida A&M University; Brian Simmons and Trenton Hunter at Texas Southern University; Dr. Kenneth Trimmins, Joel Johnson, and Maurice LeFlore of Albany State University; Dr. Ollie Liddell and Jaylon Taylor at Central High School in Memphis; Christopher Little (Jim Hill High School) and Ousman Camara (Murrah High School) of the Magnolia All-Stars; William Beathea and Stephanie Sanders at Norfolk State University; Dr. Ramon Jackson and Calvin Berry III at Jackson State University; Dr. Michael Magruder at Winston-Salem State University; Antonio D. Alexander, Elijah Thompson, Matthew Buggs, and Marcus Cummings at Georgia Mass Band; and Paul I. Adams, retired professor of music and arranger. It is also

necessary for me to acknowledge the band media and content creators who are cited in the prose and listed in the bibliography. Although we did not speak formally, I appreciate all your continued efforts in promoting Black marching band culture. To Justin Patterson, Killa Kev, and the *Talk That Talk* crew, with whom I've had discussions with, I say thank you.

Some of the people I saw in Jackson, Mississippi, were bandmates I had not seen in over thirty years, and others were former members who were unfamiliar to me. They were more than happy to help with recollections and identifying things. Many of these meetings were held at the coffee shop of my friend Ezra Brown, which became a gathering place. I thank Mitrell Sanders, Frank Terry, Mike Robinson, Xavyon Jamison, Joe Hall, Eboni Rideout, Rita Mason, Tim Washington, Cedric Eubanks, Craig Johnson, Shawn Patin, Shaun Darby, Felicia Adams, Carl Cunningham Jr., Johnny Hubbard, James Weary, Robert Lamkin, and Chris Kelker. My mentor Tommy Alforque helped pave the way for me to get to Jackson, and many choices I have made came from listening to his advice. Kamau Kenyatta, I knew before UC San Diego, and is always encouraging.

There are those who have been supportive in this academic musical life: Sabrina, Natasha, Emilie Anne, RJ, Alex, Phuong, Edrin, Audra, Mike, Carlos, Rosita, Ronald, Eleza, Buga, Myra, Adrian, Bennie, Kevin M., the Abalos-Webb family, Sandee M., Mimi, Mark B., Jenn L., Franziska, Pete, Sareth and Chris B., Reid, Doug, Allakoi, Miguel-Angel, Mikey, Ms. N. Haskins, Ma Haskins and Sis Haskins. I met Dr. Emily Ruth Allen at a conference and exchanging ideas and information with her has been beneficial. Allison Silver Adelman has done incredible work editing this dissertation.

I can only thank Ms. Maudeline L. Kelley by continuing to be the type of teacher she was to me. She was incredibly giving, and extremely patient when allowing a six-year-old who

loved the sound of instruments to join her piano studio. I am indebted to her. Lumark Gulley was my friend, mentor, and one of the best musicians I have ever known. His spirit is felt throughout this dissertation because of his impact on me personally, but also because of his legacy attached to the Sonic Boom. His arrangements continued to be played years after his departure. Finally, and most importantly, I was also fortunate to have Wil and Mary as parents. They always believed in music as a profession and did everything in their power to get me here. I am grateful for everything they have invested in me, and I hope my Ma knows that I kept my promise.

## VITA

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- 2023 Doctor of Philosophy in Music, University of California San Diego

## **ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION**

To Hip-Hop or Not: Perceptions of Race, Genre, History, and Pedagogy in the African-American Bandworld

by

Kevin P. Green

Doctor of Philosophy in Music

University of California San Diego, 2023

Professor Sarah Hankins, Chair

In this study, I explore the ways music is perceived and manifested by ensembles who meld the influences and pedagogical approaches within the overlapping ecosystems of Historically Black College and University (HBCU) show-style ensembles and Hip-Hop. Although the use of Hip-Hop in secondary, tertiary, and ancillary summer band programs is highly debated in the Black bandworld, the links between styles, not just as repertoire, but as an underlying ethos, is part of the natural existence of neighborhoods that act as an extension of the

HBCU campus, whose people designate custom-written band arrangements as a genre of Black music. Research addressing American marching ensembles is usually confined to music educators who deny the impact of Hip-Hop or lack the wherewithal to recognize where these cultural intersections lie and when they take place. Conversely, the marching arts in general have not been contextualized as a larger part of African-American popular music-making by scholars, even though the integration of Black commercial music into band culture is part and parcel of how Southern Blackness is defined to aficionados in the region.

As part of my inquiry, I historicize and frame the practice of cranking, sometimes characterized as overblowing, as Black interventionist musicking, and interrogate the rationale behind Black identity itself being negotiated within this community between bands who partake and those who don't. I investigate the aggression embodied by ensembles engaging in head-to-head battle, which impacts the dual mission of band programs of entertaining audiences and educating students. The culture and collaborative nature of arranging in the bandworld is acknowledged, but I examine the learning processes of these writers, as well as aspects of composing new material in their work. By presenting evidence obtained via musicological archival procedures, textual analysis of arrangements, and ethnographic interviews and observations, then merging it with autoethnographic reflections by means of the author's positionality as a practitioner in Hip-Hop and the marching arts, I add to the field of Hip-Hop, African-American, and popular music studies through diagnosing markers in culture and sound that live at the nexus of Black music.

## INTRODUCTION: A FOUNDATION IN MUSICAL BLACKNESS

“Before his death, President Lincoln signed a Congressional Bill establishing the Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen, and Abandoned Lands in order to assist former enslaved African Americans with their transition to freedom.”<sup>1</sup> Once released from bondage, these peoples shared the overwhelming sentiment of a desire to be educated, and to form their own institutions, such as schools and churches. It was under these auspices that by 1877 “there were more than a dozen Southern Black Colleges, plus at least two medical schools and a law school, to join four Black colleges above the Mason Dixon line.”<sup>2</sup> While racial segregation in the States is no longer legal, African Americans were prevented from attending specific Primarily White Institutions (PWIs), which was enforced either by law or unofficial policy until the 1960s.<sup>3</sup> The Higher Education Act of 1965 defines these Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs), as “institutions of Higher Learning established before 1964, whose principal mission was then, as is now, the [higher] education of Black Americans.”<sup>4</sup> Albritton cites economist Valerie Wilson, who proves the prosperity of this mission when reporting that “75% of all Black PhDs, 46% of Black executives, 50% of Black engineers, 80% of Black federal judges, and 65% of Black doctors

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<sup>1</sup> Rita Roberts, *I Can't Wait to Call You My Wife: African American Letters of Love and Family in the Civil War Era* (San Francisco: Chronicle Books, 2022), 201.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 205.

<sup>3</sup> Predominantly white institution (PWI) is the term used to describe institutions of higher learning in which Whites account for 50% or greater of the student enrollment. However, the majority of these institutions may also be understood as historically White institutions in recognition of the binarism and exclusion supported by the United States prior to 1964. It is in a historical context of segregated education that predominantly White colleges and universities are defined and contrasted from other colleges and universities that serve students with different racial, ethnic, and/or cultural backgrounds (e.g., historically Black colleges and universities, HBCUs); Kofi Lomotey, ed. *Encyclopedia of African American Education* (Thousand Oaks: SAGE Publications, 2010), <https://dx.doi.org/10.4135/9781412971966>.

<sup>4</sup> Travis J Albritton, “Educating Our Own: The Historical Legacy of HBCUs and Their Relevance for Educating a New Generation of Leaders,” *Urban Rev* 44 (2012): 311–331, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11256-012-0202-9>.

completed either their undergraduate or graduate education at an HBCU.”<sup>5</sup> According to metrics listed by the *National Center for Education Statistics*, there are currently one hundred and one accredited HBCUs in the United States and the Virgin Islands, who maintain a personal stake in the student body, a commitment to academic achievement, and the examination of various forms of Black cultural expression.<sup>6</sup> It is with this in mind that HBCUs continue to set a standard for educating African-descended people.

The idea of “Black excellence,” as a point of pride for the general African-American populace, is very much tied to the commitment of HBCUs to function as sites that preserve the richness of the history and culture. “This is achieved by trying to rectify the political and social context that existed when the majority of society routinely devalued the Black experience and our expressive practices or distorted them via blackface minstrelsy.”<sup>7</sup> A cultural locution linked to an honest depiction of Blackness materialized through the music, movement, and pageantry of the college and university marching band. As Albany State University alumna and Black Southern scholar Regina N. Bradley states, “HBCUs will always represent ideas of Black excellence for me, whether that is in the classroom or culturally, and HBCU band culture is definitely a reflection of that excellence.”<sup>8</sup> This ethos has taken root on HBCU campuses so concretely that these ensembles have come to anchor some music departments, and have become visible ambassadors, recruitment tools, and generators of revenue for these institutions.

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<sup>5</sup> Ibid., 322; Valerie Rawlston Wilson, “The Effect of Attending an HBCU on Persistence and Graduation Outcomes of African-American college students, in *Historically Black Colleges and Universities*, ed. Charles. L. Betsy (New Brunswick: Transaction, 2008), 5–47.

<sup>6</sup> National Center for Education Statistics, “College Navigator” [website], <https://nces.ed.gov/COLLEGENAVIGATOR/?s=all&sp=4&pg=1>.

<sup>7</sup> Albritton, “Educating Our Own,” 327.

<sup>8</sup> Regina N. Bradley and Christina Lee, S1 Ep. 13, “Our Band Is Better Than Your Band,” August 11, 2019, in *Bottom of The Map*, produced by Floyd Hall, podcast, MP3 audio, 47:07, <https://podcasts.apple.com/us/podcast/our-band-is-better-than-your-band/id1462206435?i=1000446682192>.

For people in the States, the military-derived marching band once typified mainstream Americana. Regardless of whether we're referencing a time before the cultural revolution of the 1960s, when marching ensembles were depicted as strait-laced, wholesome, and musically relevant, or post-cultural revolution, where they have been characterized as outdated, square, and musically irrelevant outside of college football, the musical ecosystem that sustains them is intact, and has absorbed outside musical influences on its own terms. As one of many byproducts of American racial segregation, African-American marching ensembles enjoy a different state of existence. In the words of ethnomusicologist Christopher Small, they have "[remained] in close touch with its vernacular, both feeding on it and feeding back to it."<sup>9</sup> As was revealed to photographer Jules Allen, when sharing photographs printed in his book *Marching Bands* with working players he had befriended in New York, "Henry Threadgill, Avery Brooks...all these musicians that I know in New York, who are great jazz musicians...as conceptual or avant-garde if you wanna say, all are rooted in marching bands in high school."<sup>10</sup>

As early as 1916, with James Reese Europe's 369th Hellfighters Marching band, African American-led ensembles have been in close dialogue with the popular music of the day regarding repertoire, performance practice, and daily life. My first time witnessing an HBCU band, the Jackson State University Sonic Boom of the South, provided evidence of this cultural cohesion in a manner that was more than memorable – it was life-changing. As a product of Southern California public school music education, which leans towards a traditional, military-style band aesthetic, with a repertoire consisting of marches, Western Art Music, and showtunes, I had neither seen nor heard this type of sound and pageantry.

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<sup>9</sup> Christopher Small, *Music of the Common Tongue: Survival and Celebration in Afro-American Music* (Middleton: Wesleyan University Press, 1987), 8.

<sup>10</sup> Art Catalogues, "Jules Allen with Joe Lewis and Centennial High School Marching Band," *Art Catalogues Book Talk*, video, 38:16, March 18, 2016, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PLgh99jxi8c&t=2411s>.

I had been involved in the marching arts since the fifth grade, but from then to age sixteen, when I saw my first the Sonic Boom, the only point of reference for marching ensembles having any pronounced association with African-American artistry was through a children's biography of W. C. Handy, which was provided by a mother who was desperately trying to help her son connect with his culture through music. With this in mind, she didn't hesitate to call me into the room at first sight of the Sonic Boom, while she was recording the CBS Network Television Special, *Motown 30: What Goin' On?*<sup>11</sup> At that moment, I stood mesmerized at the warm, round, jazzy sound coming through the television speakers, which was a combination of precision and funk I had never heard in a marching ensemble. Links to Black musical culture were easily detectable throughout the display; however, I felt that the references the band made to Hip-Hop culture were the most surprising. The arrangement of "U Can't Touch This" (1990) by Hammer, used while the band executed the rapper's signature moves during the dance routine, was both slick and effective. Unlike many who were familiar with HBCU bands, a marching ensemble assimilating Hip-Hop into their production was a new phenomenon for me. My pursuit of high-level jazz musicianship led to a scholarship to Jackson State (JSU), as a music education/jazz concentration major, but it was the marching band that had initially caught my attention, and that factored into my decision to attend the institution.<sup>12</sup>

William C. Banfield defines Africana studies in music as "the study of the history and culture of Black people in music, which is a specific discipline that drives questions, analysis, and examination."<sup>13</sup> As both musician and scholar, he insists that, "Its primary themes explore

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<sup>11</sup> Tapemaster, "JSU-Special Performance 1990," *JSU at Motown 30*, video, 03:09, August 23, 2012, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=v-utZFyZFK&t=91s>.

<sup>12</sup> This performance was broadcast on CBS Network Television when I was 16. I had been in marching ensembles since age 11.

<sup>13</sup> William C. Banfield, *Cultural Codes: Makings of a Black Music Philosophy* (Lanham: The Scarecrow Press, 2010), 80.

what matters...in this artform.”<sup>14</sup> Using Banfield to construct a framework, I present an ethnographic/autoethnographic study that clarifies how the symbiotic state of HBCU collegiate bands, the high school groups that feed into them, and municipality-organized summer mass bands speaks to modes of learning, sounding, arranging, and performance that many have understood as representing a form of Black identity. I contend that these ensembles and individuals don’t exist in isolation of each other, but are social actors within an ecosystem that encourages a musical and cultural dialogue between Hip-Hop and band, even though that relationship can and has been characterized as discordant. Testimony that allows for the identification of “the cultural, curricular and aesthetic contributions of the historically Black college and university bands in the area of instrumental music,” is taken in order to mark the instances, manner, techniques, existing conditions, and musical norms that sparked this adjoining of these two seemingly separate arenas.<sup>15</sup> Recognizing that the adoption of Hip-Hop into Black marching bands is not automatically seen as positive, I also look into the tensions that have arisen since its incorporation.

Hip-Hop is a movement in which instrumentalists have had a relationship that has varied from inclusion to exclusion. A reworking of ideas or techniques has been necessary for instrumentalists to be able to generate sounds necessary for the genre. For marching bands, this has meant accepting new styles of playing and presentation that are reflective of new musical trends in Black music. By 1993, I was a living example of these worlds colliding. I had begun a peer-based and autodidactic study of Hip-Hop, as a drummer, spawned by my desire to transform the sound of my acoustic instrument into the beats I attempted to mimic from DJ/producers

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<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

<sup>15</sup> Lamar Smith, “A Study of the Historical Development of Selected Black College and University Bands as a Curricular and Aesthetic Entity, 1867–1975” (PhD diss., Kansas State University, 1976), 8.

Premier and Timbaland. I had also become acclimated to JSU's marching band by my second year, as a member of the War and Thunder Drum Section and had seen Hip-Hop methodology used as a pedagogical tool during rehearsals. As the band was riddled with emcees, DJs, and aficionados, I found that Hip-Hop informed our musicality and lives in a manner that it didn't for our directors or professors. The association between these musical traditions not only included sounds, movements, and chants from Hip-Hop as part of the style and presentation of the marching band, but was also strengthened by Hip-Hop practitioners, like 2 Chainz and Big K.R.I.T, being admirers of, influenced by, or members of the show-style groups that are linked to the everyday Southern Black experience.

The type of "musical Blackness" displayed in the marching band, be it Hip-Hop influenced or not, extended to curricular and pedagogical ideas in HBCU music departments. The concept alludes to a certain required versatility they instill in us – a kind of "double consciousness" – which I knew firsthand. It means that as players and educators, you are to be proficient in Western art music and the American military band tradition, be familiar with Black composers and conductors, and also learn the skills needed for jazz, gospel, and Hip-Hop/R&B linkages to marching band.<sup>16</sup> Dr. Larry Pannell, former director of Grambling State University's Tiger Marching Band, has claimed, "Good musicians make it their business to learn the styles that are popular. A well-rounded musician, whether seeking professional engagements or enjoyment of a hobby, should be able to perform what is needed. They should know the classics, jazz, and popular standards...Diversity is the responsibility of the individual musician."<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> It should be noted that many of these departments were steeped in Western Art music in the same manner as conservatories and PWIs. However, the prominence of the marching bands, with these professors having a history as both jazz/commercial musicians and military musicians, also shaped the aesthetics of these departments.

<sup>17</sup> Laurie Dunivant Sneiderman, "Marching to Different Drummers," *Black Issues in Higher Education* 17, no. 5 (April 27, 2000): 28–33, <https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=a9h&AN=3075821&site=ehost-live>.

Epitomizing this motto meant digesting music with the ears and the eyes. Developing this skill went beyond aural training classes because ear-based communication is how ideas are transmitted in Saturday night/Sunday morning working situations, or how they are used to transcribe and arrange songs for the marching ensemble. Other required skills include transposing on sight and being able to read and react to audience behavior.<sup>18</sup>

It should not be assumed that Black Colleges have always embraced Afrological models of instruction, or that all faculty are of one philosophy. The connection of elitism and respectability politics to the study of Western Art music and Black religious conservatism was and still is present amongst HBCU faculty and administration, although the stylistic treatment of Negro Spirituals by the Jubilee Singers of Fisk University, and other choirs of that ilk, are exceptions. The rejection of Black vernacular music has been a mindset many folk have been guilty of and examples expounding on this history are discussed in the literature review. The marching band has been seen as a representation of lower musical standards, and has been subject to criticism and a source of ire for many years for some HBCU faculty and administrators. Tellingly, most HBCU music departments do not offer courses in the history of Hip-Hop or the marching arts. Unlike Berklee College of Music, the University of Indiana, or Cal Poly Pomona, Hip-Hop or popular music ensembles, are not scheduled.

Yet certain cities that contain HBCUs, like Durham, New Orleans, Atlanta, Houston, and Jackson, foster an environment where young Black musicians train with Black teachers, sometimes starting with instruments at the elementary school level. These educators sometimes become surrogate parents, and the lineage of where these educators went to college is a part of

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<sup>18</sup> Reading and knowing an audience speaks to the nuances of playing for dancers versus people coming to sit and listen. It also means understanding song selection when constructing a set. I played with a leader in New York who wanted to play a ballad in a bar full of patrons who were there to drink, and not to listen. As you could probably guess, our set ended terribly.

the education that students receive from them. This environment breeds musicians who regularly perform for and receive feedback from Black audience members in the same manner as they do at church. This atmosphere was present in San Diego in the 1970s, like at Crawford High School, but had disappeared by the late 1980s. My first music teacher, Ms. Maudeline L. Kelley, was an elderly Black woman from Chicago, who gave me a semblance of this nurturing. Studying with her from age six to age thirteen was invaluable; however, her studio existed out of the musical infrastructure presented to me as ideal, even though her students routinely became standout musicians in the San Diego Youth Symphony.<sup>19</sup> Outside of sacred institutions, Black music aesthetics in San Diego were completely marginalized during my formative years.

As a JSU undergraduate, I became immersed in a Black music ethos. I began to understand the larger meaning of music to us as a people. Be it gospel, R&B, House, Hip-Hop, or band music itself being considered a genre, music encapsulated the college experience for the entire student body on what we call the “yard,” or the Black college campus. It functioned in a similar fashion for the many African-American neighborhoods, from Baltimore, Maryland, to Houston, Texas, that encompassed the institutions.

One aspect of this atmosphere was the affinity young Black listeners had for live musicianship. The band Mint Condition stopped at JSU as part of a HBCU promotional tour, with an understanding that this audience recognized them as a band, and not a vocal group. I didn't really know many bands outside of jazz, at the time, sans the J.B.'s, the Minneapolis music, Roger Troutman and Zapp, or groups associated with the Acid Jazz movement, like The Brand New Heavies. Looks of bewilderment about my lack of knowledge of Earth, Wind & Fire, Frankie Beverly and Maze, Chitlin' Circuit, and Blues and Southern Soul artists, like Willie

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<sup>19</sup> For a time, every African-American musician associated with the San Diego Youth Symphony had come from the Southeast Youth Community Orchestra and/or Ms. Kelley's private studio.

Clayton and Mel Waiters, gave way to me performing these tunes in various ensembles and venues. For Hip-Hop specifically, the musical symbiosis went beyond Miami Bass and New Orleans Bounce music, which were ubiquitous for parties in Jackson at the time. Hip-Hop from all regions laced the aural palette of the student body at JSU and other HBCUs in the 1990s.

My ignorance of HBCU band culture is in direct opposition to the experience of young bandheads who consume clips of bands and auxiliary units that saturate social media feeds; this exposes the uninitiated in ways unheard of when I was in high school.<sup>20</sup> Yet in a post- *Drumline* (2002) feature film, *Bring It!* (2014) Lifetime reality show, and Beyoncé, Coachella *Homecoming* (2019) world, there is still some unfamiliarity with subject matter concerning perceptions of race, region, pedagogy, and genre when studying this musical ecosystem.<sup>21</sup> Even with the heightened interest that has been shown by music journalists in regards to the compendium of cultural practices with show-style ensembles, the level of reporting on them has been surface level. Some feel, as I do, that this “discovery” into the Black bandworld is due to Bey’s stellar performance and Netflix film.<sup>22</sup> Writers who authored articles and think pieces that followed in its wake were enamored with the performance aspects of her presentation and her Black feminist leanings, but didn’t really possess the language to explain the contributions from

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<sup>20</sup> Bandhead: The original meaning was a participant or aficionado of show-style marching bands. The term has recently taken on the connotation of aficionados who prefer an aggressive style of performance influenced by Hip-Hop, and who prefer marching band all year to wind ensemble. It came into use as a distinction from “band geek” or “band nerd,” which are descriptions of band musicians emanating from American mainstream popular culture, but which do not accurately characterize show-style band members and their status amongst peers. The term has now been used to establish a social network at <https://bandhead.org/>.

<sup>21</sup> DD4L, or Dancing Dolls 4 Life, is the majorette dance brand and youth dance training company founded by CEO Dianna Williams. The entity was founded in Jackson, Mississippi, in 2001, but has expanded to multiple cities. <https://www.dd4l.net/fun-facts>; Mrs. Williams is credited, along with the Black queer community, for spreading the popularity of this style of dance, which HBCU band auxiliary units are known for, outside of the HBCU ecosystem. Lifetime Television started to broadcast a series entitled *Bring It!* in 2014, documenting the lives of this dance community. <https://www.mylifetime.com/shows/bring-it>.

<sup>22</sup> Bandworld: A term I’ve heard used both by announcers at Battle of the Band events, and by band media online content providers like Showstyle Talk. The term describes the community of players, teachers and instructors, arrangers, auxiliary members, announcers, media members, bandheads (fans), family members, and increasingly judges, that are connected to the ecosystem of primary, secondary, and tertiary show-style marching bands.

the marching ensemble she featured. They could not put her musicians' sounds into the context of a wider discussion of Black vernacular music.

William Beathea, my former percussion instructor at JSU and current Director of Bands at Norfolk State University (NSU), feels that a different incident was the catalyst for the newfound interest in the bands we participate in. In his estimation, there was a shift in perception, or at least what can be characterized as a willingness to listen to perspectives on Black cultural production, due to the reckoning following the murder of George Floyd.<sup>23</sup> I myself felt a different kind of energy during a summer research trip to Houston, where I attended a NSU Spartan Legion rehearsal before the 2021 Cracker Barrel Battle of the Bands. A production team looking to shoot a documentary project for Netflix, with the Spartan Legion being a focal point, was also in the mix. When I asked the producer how her documentary was going to differ from the series featuring Bethune-Cookman already within the portal, she seemed taken aback, and insisted that her series would not be derivative. Overtures being made to these ensembles are positive, but newcomers to the culture are not always familiar with the coverage that has already been offered or has historically featured these bands.

Black participation in non-commercial music has not been thoroughly discussed by those in African-American Studies or Ethnic Studies, in comparison to in Hip-Hop and other popular genres. Even with Hip-Hop, or rather rap music, scholars in these disciplines often tend to overvalue input from music industry–designated artists and impresarios. There is a level of focus on the rapper and their lyrical content, as it relates to the larger sociological, societal, or political implications, that allows them to sidestep any meaningful musical analysis that concerns the generation and reception of sound. Conversely, research addressing American marching

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<sup>23</sup> William Beathea, discussion with colleagues and author, August 28, 2021.

ensembles is usually written by music educators seeking advanced degrees. At worst, they deny the musical merits of Hip-Hop, and at best, they don't have the wherewithal to recognize where the intersections lie and when they take place. For those who are familiar, the ubiquity of Hip-Hop on HBCU campuses, and its eventual acceptance as a source of repertoire, has stalled scholarly scrutiny and hindered documentation of the incremental changes in ideas and culture that led to the mutual impact that band and Hip-Hop have had on each other. The marching arts in general have not been contextualized as a larger part of African-American popular music-making even though the integration of Hip-Hop into band culture is linked to Southern Blackness. As Big DeMo (Sherman), a member of the Screwed-Up Click, explained in an ethnographic study of Houston rap, band and gospel musicians are both agents of creativity who have skills capable of contributing to Hip-Hop:

There's a lot of studios in Houston, but they didn't let us in. And so when we start findin' out more about it and learnin' more about it, you know, you had people that knew some stuff. What helped it was these band guys. The guys that were in the band. These guys that played the piano. These guys helped the music down here in Houston – helped Hip-Hop grow, because they knew about tracks. They knew about musical notes. They knew how to read music. They knew how to play anything with keys. They knew that stuff. So, you grab those guys, you grab the dude that played the piano or the organ in the church, 'cuz you say, "Oh, I think I need them." So you grab him, and you put him on your team, and then you take the guys that plays that one drum in the band. You grab him, and you pull him with you, and now you got you a production crew.<sup>24</sup>

Like brass band musicians in New Orleans, marching band players and educators live as culture bearers in conjunction with or as Hip-hop practitioners themselves. I seek to integrate them into the conversation of Hip-Hop, African-American, and popular music studies, to better reflect their in-person and social media portrayal within the Black bandworld.

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<sup>24</sup> Lance Scott Walker, *Houston Rap Tapes: An Oral History of Bayou City Hip-Hop* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2018), 241–242.

## **Show-Style/HBCU-Style/Traditional-Style Bands**

In this dissertation I refer to a “show-style band,” also known as a “traditional band,” or “HBCU-style band,” in line with respected educators from the National Show Band Association.<sup>25</sup> The audio and now video podcast *Show Style Talk* named themselves using the term. This media outlet has been a continual source of information for research purposes, with scores of viewers and commenters. Another media source, [bandhead.org](http://bandhead.org), features comments and video posts with the term used frequently by users. Nevertheless, tensions have been cited in a doctoral thesis by Freamon McNair III, because of the disputed origins of the term, and its links to minstrelsy. The evidence McNair provides is a Facebook thread detailing that the derogatory use stems from comments heard from non-Black students about HBCU bands, which is something I am not concerned with. Secondly, the history of Black musicianship in America is tied to instrumentalists who worked the minstrel circuit, including the one-time Alabama A&M music educator W.C. Handy.<sup>26</sup> It is possible to glean techniques, ideas, repertoire, or other positive attributes of musicianship that musicians displayed without celebrating the White supremacist ideology that minstrel shows bolstered.<sup>27</sup>

## **Methodology**

Within my framework, data is presented under a “usable, flexible, and unifying set of themes,” that has emerged from all my sources.<sup>28</sup> With respect to research methodology, I use ethnology with an ethnographic/autoethnographic and multiple methods approach to data

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<sup>25</sup> “Showband” is defined properly by the National Show Band Association, <https://www.nationalshowbands.com/defined>. Distinctive elements of a showband performance are also provided, <https://www.nationalshowbands.com/showstyle-band>.

<sup>26</sup> David Robertson, *W. C. Handy: The Life and Times of the Man Who Made the Blues* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2009), 97.

<sup>27</sup> Freamon McNair III, “Teaching Marching Band In Urban Schools” (master’s thesis, Liberty University, 2017), 104–107.

<sup>28</sup> Banfield, *Cultural Codes*, 84.

collection. Material is extracted from readings, close media analysis, theoretical analysis of arrangements, soundwalks, in-person observations, and interpretation of in-depth interviews with practitioners. My position as an instrumentalist in Hip-Hop and band supports the utilization of layered accounts techniques, as a means of informing my research. The approach of “focusing on the author’s experience alongside data, abstract analysis, and relevant literature,” creates a robust study.<sup>29</sup>

I found it challenging to integrate my own music-making experiences with those of others in a fashion that engages and informs the reader. Colleagues and professors continually encourage me to foreground my voice and allow my writing to act as my proxy within the scholarship. This observation is appreciated, mainly because I hear prose identical to the way I hear the music, which means, like for many jazz musicians, if I can’t hear it in my head, I can’t write it. The ideas must flow from my brain, to my voice, and land on the computer keyboard, to then be seen on the page.

Honestly, I didn’t consider the autobiographical grounding of this work as an approach that had already been researched and proven. It was the series of exercises and readings I completed with Dr. M. Leslie-Santana, in the creative ethnography seminar, that is assisting me here. In her memoir, *Traveling Heavy*, we read and talked about anthropologist and University of Michigan professor Ruth Behar’s life growing up in New York, and as a mother in Ann Arbor, an academic, and a novelist.<sup>30</sup> The candidness of her writing about navigating being both Cuban and Jewish, and perhaps being White-adjacent in the eyes of her own family and others, demonstrated the type of care I want to take when discussing race in my own work.

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<sup>29</sup> Sherick A. Hughes and Julie L. Pennington, *Autoethnography: Process, Product, and Possibility for Critical Social Research* (Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications, Inc., 2017), 22, <https://dx.doi.org/10.4135/9781483398594.n1>.

<sup>30</sup> Ruth Behar, *Traveling Heavy: A Memoir In Between Journeys* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2013).

Also impactful was a woman I saw in the multi-episode Netflix documentary *High on the Hog: How African American Transformed America*, and the stories she tells about Afro-diasporic foodways.<sup>31</sup> The short series is based on a book of the same name by food historian Dr. Jessica B. Harris. She effortlessly combines research about food origins and ingredients, historical prose, and writing recipes, but also has the expertise to prepare them. Her scholarship, writing, presenting work, and cooking, matches my philosophy of a multi-tiered practice of research, creation, execution, and teaching of music. Her presence in the documentary, as well as the cities of New York and Paris being described as characters in her memoir, *My Soul Looks Back*, help illustrate a multifaceted Blackness, complete with her associations with Maya Angelou and James Baldwin in each of those locations and all their interactions with music that Harris made sure to include.<sup>32</sup>

Some of the details included in a dissertation about teaching within the Black bandworld lend credence to this autobiographical strategy. In Dr. Jorim Edgar Reid Sr.'s "Marching Sound Machine's: An Autobiography of a Director of Bands at an Historically Black College," he painstakingly goes through his personal and professional successes, struggles, failures, ultimate departure, when reviewing life-lessons learned while holding his position at North Carolina Central University (NCCU), in Durham, North Carolina. He quotes Carolyn Ellis when writing "Autoethnography frees musicians from writing dry descriptions or reports of musical experiences. Instead, this approach encourages them to convey the meanings of vibrant musical experiences evocatively. The focus becomes telling a tale that readers can enter and feel a part

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<sup>31</sup> *High on the Hog: How African American Transformed America*, "Episode 1: 'Our Roots'," Netflix, May 26, 2021.

<sup>32</sup> Jessica B. Harris, *My Soul Looks Back: A Memoir* (New York: Scribner, 2017).

of.”<sup>33</sup> A point of intersection with my own life makes this material especially valid. I arrived in Durham, North Carolina in 2014, trying and eventually failing to enter PhD programs at either Duke University or the University of North Carolina Chapel Hill. I rented a residence near NCCU and immersed myself in their campus culture to meet people and had a chance to attend a picnic with marching band members the summer after Reid Sr. left the university. Students were unhappy with the situation and were not pleased with the administrators who they felt had forced him out.

Despite my personal connection to Reid’s material, I turn to Banfield again, with his memoir *Representing Black Music Culture: Then, Now, and When Again* to guide the autobiographical slant of my research. He has an innate ability to understand himself as an African-American musical being in the wider world, with the importance and gravity that entails, by using his life story, starting as a young musician in Detroit. I quote him at length to make this point:

My job as an artist is to document the culture as I live through and within it. This book talks about what it is to be a Black musician growing up in America. A story rarely told, badly needed, and from which there is much to gain because our stories of people and music light, inspire, and lift...Black music in particular has played a unique and critical role due to the primacy of music in the evolution of our cultural, historical development in the modern world...There is no other group of people whose humanity was measured, tested, and defined by their music, and it was this definition which manifested style, approaches, and conceptions of music-making that became the quintessential aesthetic foundation for modern American music and popular music as we know it today. Even in the early twentieth century when racist and hateful depictions of Black people were circulated in American popular culture, consciously calling and claiming Blacks as coons and watermelon eaters, bucks and mammies, Black people were making music that better defined the human condition, and that art went on to actually changing the human condition and modernity.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> Carolyn Ellis, *The Ethnographic I: A Methodological Novel About Autoethnography* (Walnut Creek, California: Altamira Press, 2004), 9, quoted in Jorim Edgar Reid Sr., “Marching Sound Machines: An Autoethnography of a Director of Bands at an Historically Black College and University” (DMA diss., Boston University, 2020), 440.

<sup>34</sup> William C. Banfield, *Representing Black Music Culture: Then, Now, and When Again* (Lanham: The Scarecrow Press, 2011), xvi–xvii, xxiv.

For me, being a product of an HBCU music department and marching band, but hailing from a place that is so musically and culturally different, has granted me a unique perspective on race, place, genre, and pedagogy that is central to ethnographic work.

With this piece established, I looked into entering the field to do observations and conduct interviews, but a series of events delayed this process and caused a pivot in the emphasis. The reality of the shutdown in reaction to the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020 was the primary event, and isolation ordinances halted any hopes of in-person fieldwork until 2021. I started my research with readings, online sources, and studying some musical arrangements on YouTube, and then moved to doing some preliminary interviews over video conferencing platforms. Not until 2021 did I observe rehearsals, take notes, and interview students and directors at Texas Southern (TxSU) in Houston and Florida A&M (FAMU) in Tallahassee. Being in Houston also provided me with an opportunity to peruse Hip-Hop archival collections at the University of Houston and Rice University, in Texas, and attend Battle of the Bands events.

Dr. Liz Przybylski's *Hybrid Ethnography* addresses situations she struggled with researching in the time of a pandemic, forcing her to take a hybrid online/in-the-field approach to ethnography.<sup>35</sup> These struggles which we were all dealing with made "armchair ethnography" a necessity, but luckily creatives both within and outside of academia had started to create and post new content. Viewers were drawn to this material in addition to media portals that had previously existed, with an unforeseen amount of desperation, in efforts to establish human connections while being isolated at home. Again, the murder of George Floyd during this time

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<sup>35</sup> Liz Przybylski, *Hybrid Ethnography: Online, Offline, and In Between* (Los Angeles: Sage, 2021).

precipitated a reevaluation of the importance of Black culture production. Show-style band content that had existed years prior started being foregrounded in the social media space.

The online content I discovered was crucial to this research and created a “snowball” effect – a term used by sociologists to describe when meeting one subject leads to meeting another. In my case, it was sources leading to other sources. Eddie Evans, owner and operator of the MeetMeonthe50/The Fifty Brand show-style band media portal, hosted a series of live-streamed events in 2020, including talks with well-known music educators. His interview with arranger Paul I. Adams, a former instructor of mine, and FAMU Marching 100 Chief Arranger Lindsey Sarjeant, yielded a wealth of information, along with contributions made by the many commenters tuning in. This material guided my inquiry when I spent time with the Marching 100 during a research trip to FAMU in 2021, and spent time chatting with Adams at the 2023 HBCU Band Directors’ Consortium Convention. These in-person interactions dovetailed with articles and dissertations about the band. This led to the discovery of *The Bandroom Podcast*, which is not specific to the HBCU ecosystem, and to their interview with FAMU alum, composer, and arranger Marie A. Douglas. After I became aware of her skill-set, she in turn was able to contribute to this dissertation through my interview with her. Marie made it clear that she was pleased with our conversation, as it was conducted with a greater understanding of not only the HBCU musical and cultural environment we shared, but also with a consciousness of her inner-city Atlanta background, and the Hip-Hop that influences both of our musical lives. The areas of my source material seemed to be “speaking” to each other. This allowed me to draw the most pertinent content available, which assisted in shaping my interviews.

The second event occurred during Fall of 2021. Originally the overriding theme of this dissertation dealt with historical and current aspects of instrumentalism in Hip-Hop, with student

and working musicians. Material covering HBCU bands was to be a portion of this research, which is what I shared during my presentation during the Society of Ethnomusicology Virtual Conference in October of 2021. My work was presented with that of two other scholars, also concentrating on music within the HBCU ecosystem. Our panel was representative of the pronounced focus on Black music topics and scholarship apparent during the conference. With a pre-conference symposium entitled “Celebrating Historically Black Colleges and Universities’ (HBCUs) Musical Legacy: An Exploration of Relationships Between HBCUs and the Society for Ethnomusicology,” Black music scholarship was forward-facing that year. The feedback I received from scholars at the conference was overwhelmingly positive, and when my committee and a publisher advised that I home in on the band material for the entire dissertation, a decision to go in this direction was easily made.

At that point, moving forward meant having to reorganize ideas, with the realization that some of my interview subjects would now be high school students. High schools with HBCU band directors represent the institutions just as much as the collegiate directors do. I decided to divide cohorts of human participants into two groups: (1) High school students, ages seventeen and under; and (2) high school, collegiate, post-collegiate alumni band members, and professional musicians/music educators/music arrangers, ages eighteen and above. In the end, one exceptional high school student, Kendrick Williams, was able to be interviewed, and he provided a wealth of material.

There was a certain amount of overlap with sites and positions, with the total experience of each of my interviewees/participants their informing testimony. For example, Jaylon Taylor is a graduate of Central High School in Memphis, Tennessee, and Jackson State University. Jaylon’s high school band director was Dr. Ollie Liddell, son of Dr. Lewis Liddell, who was the

director of Bands during my tenure in 1992, 1993, and 1995. I met Jaylon while he was playing, arranging, and instructing for the 2022 Magnolia All-Stars summer band season, but he also secured a position as Assistant Band Director at Central, with Dr. O. Liddell, for the 2022–2023 school year. After I saw Ollie at a high school Battle of the Bands event in Jackson, he invited me to observe his students. I then attended a gym battle between Craigmont High School and Central in December of 2022 where Jaylon agreed to act as the point person. I secured an interview with him, and later traveled to Memphis to interview Kendrick Williams. All these positions and associations in the ecosystem – student, teacher, arranger – give actors a different outlook.

Although I observed many high schools from August 2021 to June 2023, both in person and online, I was not embedded as deeply as I had hoped. Living in Jackson did indeed place me inside the ecosystem once again, but I didn't realize the music programs in the Jackson Public School system are a shell of themselves in comparison to when I lived in the city in the early 1990s. Additionally, gaining access to some individuals due to IRB issues was near impossible. Still, the offhand comments and observations from friends, who are now considered “oldheads,” were invaluable, and justified my move down South again.<sup>36</sup>

Cohort 1 consists of high school students ages 14–17 who are under the instruction of HBCU show-style band alumni. Data collection methods at high schools did not include any identifiable markers linked to students under age seventeen. I didn't get as much direct information as I would have liked from current high school students, but most Cohort 2 interlocutors were able to recall their high school band experience. I attended four public high school band battles, one of which was sponsored by JSU. It seems like everyone records and

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<sup>36</sup> Oldheads: Former members of HBCU marching bands, which controversially does not mean these individuals graduated. I, too, am an “oldhead,” and current and prospective members usually seek us out for knowledge.

posts these events online. I consumed footage from JSU's media team, and other professionalized band media teams like Marching Sport, A1 Media, Smash Time Productions, and Killa Kev Productions. Stemming from New Orleans band culture, battles before parades in the line-up area are now standard for many high school groups in several areas. Before the Martin Luther King Day Parade in Jackson, I took footage of several bands and/or drum lines playing against one another in the line-up area.

Seeing the interaction of HBCU music educators with their students helps to establish how this band ecosystem gets renewed and replenished and how Hip-Hop becomes a factor at this level. I found that Kendrick was the ideal candidate for this research. He plays flute for wind ensemble, but is also a percussion section leader. He is a self-taught composer, using MuseScore, but has also used concepts learned in an Advanced Placement Music Theory course to write his arrangement of "Heyyy" (2022), by Lil Baby, which he conducted during the battle. He is a fan of Hans Zimmer, and makes beats and other projects using Ableton Live.<sup>37</sup> With his skill-set, he could go in many musical directions, but he has earned a scholarship to Jackson State to major in music education. After participating in marching in the band and graduating with a degree in music education, like J. Taylor, Kendrick plans to return to Central to be band director.

Cohort 2 consists of interlocutors who are on record with short- or long-form interviews. Summer bands are community-based groups composed of current high school students, collegiate students, and HBCU band alumni. My personal interactions were only with Cohort 2. I attended rehearsals and performances for the Magnolia All-Stars program in 2022, and the Georgia Mass Band program in 2022 and 2023. These performances, or in this case, battles, were

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<sup>37</sup> MuseScore software is a free, open source, sheet music editor, which is both a desktop and mobile application. It operates in conjunction with <https://musescore.com/>, a large, free sheet music catalog, which allows users to make personal pages and upload their scores. Young and often untrained arrangers in the African-American bandworld use these applications when starting to experiment with arranging.

public events that provided a wealth of data. The 2022 Independence Day Showdown included the Magnolia All-Stars, Alabama Mass Band, The Regulators, and the Memphis Mass Band taking part in field and stand battles. The 2023 Battle for the Culture V, held in June of 2023, was billed as a rematch between the Georgia Mass Band and the New Orleans All Star band. All observations were written in fieldnotes, with still pictures, and audio/visual recordings of the bands and crowd reactions being recorded during public performances. As always, professional band media was also present.

As far as collegiate bands are concerned, as stated earlier, I visited rehearsals for FAMU TxSU, and Norfolk in summer of 2021. There are now several promoted Battle of the Band events for collegiate bands, which is a source of tension that will be investigated. I went to the Cracker Barrel Battle of the Bands, in Houston, to obtain data. I attended rehearsals, tailgates, and football games for JSU and Albany State during their fall season. The Martin Luther King Day Parade, in Jackson, provided an opportunity to see the newest version of the Mississippi Valley University Marching Band. In spring, I also frequented JSU Basketball games. All of the interview subjects are students, alumni, directors, and bandheads from, or who are fans of, the following organizations: Jackson State University Sonic Boom of the South, Alcorn State University Sounds of Dyn-O-Mite, Southern University Human Jukebox, Florida A&M Marching 100, Texas Southern University Ocean of Soul, Tennessee State University Aristocrat of Bands, Norfolk State University Spartan Legion, Albany State University Golden Rams Marching Show Band, Howard University Showtime Marching Band, Magnolia All-Stars, The Regulators, Georgia Mass Band, and Central High School Marching Warrior Band.

### **Limitations**

There are omissions in this study that will be noticeable to those who intimately know the

African-American bandworld. I realize the importance of learning music through dance, or the relationship of music to dance in Afro-Diasporic cultures. However, the auxiliary units, which consist of baton twirlers, majorette/dance teams, and color guard members are not part of this study. The mention of DD4L does not do justice to these individuals, who for many outweigh the noteworthiness of the bands. The decision to omit this facet of the ecosystem was in recognition that attention to these units requires scholars versed in African-American, queer, and dance studies just to get started. Squad coaches, squad members and alumni, band directors, and fans would have also needed to be consulted. This subject matter was outside of the scope of this study.

The role of the drum major, their position of leadership within the band, and the movements they execute deservingly receive an abundant share of attention, but they, too, act as more of a visual element than an aural one. An aspect that could be understood as a missed opportunity, and a direction for a future study, would be documenting the sounds and contributions from the band announcers. Sound is the central issue here, and these individuals announce names, and inject commentary during the drill and dance block. Announcers act as hype people for bands when leading the crowd in call-and-response chants to add effect. Their absence is felt on the field when you do not hear them just as largely as their presence is missing in this study.

## **Gender**

Although Elizabeth Gould is correct when arguing that bands have long been “the purview of [W]hite middle class men,” created in a masculine, athletic, patriotic image, I have learned that differences in perception of marching band culture shapes how gender is

constructed.<sup>38</sup> The previous description fits the image that many male band members have of themselves, but in reality the depiction of them as uncool in mainstream society doesn't match the hypermasculine self-fashioning. In the Black bandworld, where playing in the band is considered better than or equal to being an athlete in the societal order of things, band musicians are granted the same position of any other instrumentalist in the community, with all the gendering of instruments and other marginalization of girls/women that accompanies this.<sup>39</sup> Luckily, my time as an elementary school music teacher was not filled with girls telling me that their family members disapproved of them playing drums or other instruments because of their gender, but within the band ecosystem, this does occur.

It is important not to use an example of exceptionalism to gloss over issues of gender in the marching arts in general, the Black band world in particular, and sites of training and employment in Black music overall. Truthfully, I tried to interview as many women as possible for this dissertation, but did not communicate with as many as I had hoped. Still, the contributions from women in this dissertation are strong, with some being introspective when discussing gender, and others not mentioning it at all.

I have written about the admiration I have for my music history professor and JSU Dean Emeritus Dr. Dollye E. Robinson on separate occasions throughout my academic journey. Her work and service to the university led to the College of Liberal Arts at Jackson State being named in her honor. In an interview towards the end of her life, she was upfront about her time in the Black bandworld, which was filled with positive experiences, but I also think her historical

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<sup>38</sup> Elizabeth Gould, "Re-Membering Bands in North America: Gendered Paradoxes and Potentialities," in *Critical Perspectives in Canadian Music Education*, eds. Carol A. Beynon and Kari K. Veblen (Waterloo: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2012), 102–103.

<sup>39</sup> Hal Abeles, "Are Musical Instrument Gender Associations Changing?" *Journal of Research in Music Education* 57, no. 2 (July 2009): 127–139.

significance in conjunction with the growth of the Jackson State marching band has not been acknowledged as much as it should. Her story started when her association with the institution began while she was a student at Lanier High School. She started playing with the band at what was then Jackson College as a teenager. She earned a scholarship to the institution in the 1940s, granted by the president of the university, who also played in the band.<sup>40</sup>

At that time, she was the only young woman in the ensemble. Different from many women of her era, Dr. Robinson received encouragement and support. Saxophonist and Chicago State University Director of Bands Roxanne Stevenson was interviewed by Devan Moore, as is reported in Moore's dissertation, "The Chocolate Maestra: A Narrative Inquiry into the Lived Experiences of Black Female Band Directors." Stevenson attended Bethune-Cookman at a comparable time to Robinson. She was allowed to major in music, but not to play in the marching band.<sup>41</sup> In contrast, Hampton Institute, in Virginia, started their band with only male members in the late 1800s, but six women had joined the forty-nine-piece group by 1941.<sup>42</sup> Mostly, multiple sources indicate that although there were some collegiate bands specifically for women, institutions did not fully integrate them into ensembles with men until the passage of Title IX in 1972.<sup>43</sup>

Dr. Robinson indicated that she was protected by the young men in the band. Others were not this fortunate. Testimony from women who joined the Penn State band in the 1970s, directly

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<sup>40</sup> Bill Ellison, MSM 619, "Dr. Dollye Robinson – Surrounded by Music," June 17, 2019, in *Mississippi Moments Podcast*, produced by Ross Walton, podcast, MP3 audio, and text, 10:20, <https://mississippimoments.org/msm-618-dr-dollye-robinson-surrounded-by-music>.

<sup>41</sup> Devan Moore, "The Chocolate Maestra: A Narrative Inquiry Into The Lived Experiences of Black Female Band Directors" (PhD diss., Florida State University, 2022), 31–32.

<sup>42</sup> Lori Rae Shipley, "A History of the Music Department at Hampton Institute/University, 1868–1972" (DMA diss., Boston University, 2009), 62, 239, <https://www.proquest.com/dissertations-theses/history-music-department-at-hampton-institute/docview/304831137/se-2>.

<sup>43</sup> Jill M. Sullivan and Amy E. Spears, "All-Female School Bands: Separate Spheres and Gender Equality," in *Women's Bands in America: Performing Music and Gender*, ed. Jill M. Sullivan (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Unlimited Model, 2016), 118.

after integration, spoke of treatment that would be described as sexual harassment in modern terms.<sup>44</sup> In Joshua D. Gailey’s dissertation, “Beginning Bands Progressive Reform and the Birth of the American School–Band Industry, 1907–1940,” there is an entire section dedicated to a type of projected masculinity onto marching band participation, with references to sports and military tropes. This masculinist vision of the marching band was rendered with the purpose of recruiting exclusively White boys to the activity. This vision was promoted by music educators and musical instrument retailers for the purpose of gaining their interest. The activity was sold as an alternative to piano or violin study, which could be gendered as feminine (demographics of prominent orchestras of the day notwithstanding). In the Black bandworld, Olivia Broslawsky has argued that “the show band style and preference in the New Orleans Band culture for loud sound and exaggerated movements encourages hypermasculine performance within the band.”<sup>45</sup> Although I feel that she would need to research bands outside of New Orleans to understand variances in style within the ecosystem, there is validity to her statement because much of Black marching band culture emanates from there. What cannot be overlooked, however, is the testimony she took from her interlocutors concerning gender restrictions being assigned to instruments. Broslawsky reported, “Many of the girls I have spoken with who play instruments that are gendered as masculine have experienced negative reactions from family members, friends, and audiences who have seen their performance on these instruments as out of place and believed that because they are girls they will be less successful and will not have the physical strength required to play these instruments.”<sup>46</sup> Fortunately for Dr. Robinson, the positive

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<sup>44</sup> Michquelena Potlunas Ferguson, “The First Women Instrumentalists in the Penn State Marching Blue Band After the Enactment of Title IX,” *Visions of Research in Music Education*, no. 36 (September 2020): 14, <https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=eue&AN=146305951&site=ehost-live.erguson>.

<sup>45</sup> Olivia Broslawsky, “Marching Forth: A Study On The Impact Of Gender On The Professionalization Of Marching Band Students In New Orleans” (master’s thesis, Tulane University, 2017), 13.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, 55.

reinforcement she experienced as a trumpet player and her desire to learn different instruments convinced her to become a band director.

In 1952, after graduating and teaching music at a high school, Dr. Robinson was hired to help build the band at Jackson College, independent of student “ringers” from Lanier High School students, even though “there were no female band directors at that time.”<sup>47</sup> In fact, it wasn’t until 2005 that the first woman was hired in the head position as Director of Bands at an HBCU.<sup>48</sup> Rhonda L. Harper headed the marching band, pep band, jazz ensemble, and concert band, while teaching conducting and trumpet applied methods at Lincoln University, until 2017.<sup>49</sup> Getting the advanced degrees necessary to attain such a position can be challenging. Roxanne Stevenson said she hurried through her graduate matriculation because her department chair told her that women had no place teaching music.<sup>50</sup>

This indicates that although Dr. Robinson, Stevenson, and Harper have excelled despite being Black girls/women, gender discrimination was and continues to be an issue in the marching arts. Both Harper and Stevenson have spoken about being the lone woman, or one of few women, at professional development conferences and panels for HBCU band directors. This is one of the reasons the Association of Black Women Band Directors was created in 2020, and music educator Krystal Williams produces her YouTube broadcast *Diary of a Lady Band Director*, as part of the Passion Is...Network.

## **Positionality**

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<sup>47</sup> Bill Ellison, MSM 619, “Dr. Dollye Robinson – Surrounded by Music.”

<sup>48</sup> Janae Adams, “Rhonda L. Harper’s Experience is Transforming Clark Atlanta’s Marching Band,” *Andscape* [media portal], November 13, 2018, <https://andscape.com/features/rhonda-l-harpers-experience-is-transforming-clark-atlantas-marching-band/>.

<sup>49</sup> Samantha Berley, “Wonder Women,” *Halftime Magazine* [online], April 24, 2013, <https://halftimemag.com/features/wonder-women.html>.

<sup>50</sup> Moore, “The Chocolate Maestra,” 32.

In the edited volume *Conversations About Reflexivity*, the term reflexivity “is defined as the regular exercise of the mental ability, shared by all normal people, to consider themselves in relation to their (social) contexts and vice versa.”<sup>51</sup> I situate myself in this study as both insider and outsider. As a nineteen-year-old Black male in band, I was fully embedded as a participant in the Black bandworld, with a privileged position. However, as I alluded to earlier, not being raised within the ecosystem or in the South put me at a disadvantage. There was a large amount of culture shock to work through, and many of these instances played themselves out in public. A level of perseverance helped me establish relationships, and the reputation I built amongst my bandmates then provided a level of affability between myself and the interlocutors I spoke with for this study. I was seen as a member of the War and Thunder Drum Section. I’m considered an “oldhead” (band alumni) who has done well for himself in becoming a scholar researching a culture I was a part of. This trust has allowed me to gain access to institutions and individuals, at the high school and collegiate level, which may have been difficult otherwise.

Much of my outsider status came from being removed from the bandworld since graduating in 1997, and not really paying attention to the stylistic differences that have occurred since then. I’ve been focusing on other musical endeavors I needed to master to make a living, and only occasionally looked at Jackson State’s band. While moving to Jackson in 2023 reacquainted me with the ecosystem, I still lived in this middle area, regarding insider/outsider status, with the marching band at my alma mater. Since all the professors I built my strong reputation with retired, gaining access on the institutional level was more difficult than I anticipated. In 2014, I rode on the bus with the band and talked with the Director of Bands, Dowell Taylor, and band members after they completed the homecoming parade. This

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<sup>51</sup> Margaret S. Archer, “Definition,” in *Conversations About Reflexivity*, ed. Margaret S. Archer (New York: Taylor and Francis, 2009), i.

affordance was not offered in 2023.

## Literature Review

As part of the Popular Music Books in Process series, held by the International Association for the Study of Popular Music – U.S., Dr. Guthrie Ramsey and Dr. Tammy L. Kernodle discussed the rationale behind Ramsey deciding to write his text *Race Music: Black Cultures From Bebop to Hip-Hop*, before converting his dissertation on pianist Bud Powell into a full-length book entitled *The Amazing Bud Powell: Black Genius, Jazz History, and the Challenge of Bebop*.<sup>52</sup> During the discussion, the conversation drifted to address an issue within the academy pertaining to the rift between Black music researchers, and Black scholars outside of music departments who often write about Black music. This problem has been a concern of the now-retired Ramsey since early in his career, in the 1990s. He wrote about his early detection of the exclusion of music scholarship spearheaded by musicians by those in the Black humanities in the introduction of his newest collection of writings, which is a historiography of Black music scholarship, *Who Hears Here? On Black Music Past and Present*. Ramsey states, “*Black Popular Culture* (1992), edited by Gina Dent, was a beacon to many...No musicologists were included in the landmark *Black Popular Culture*, a fact that wasn’t lost on me at the time. Bridging this chasm between Black cultural studies and musicology has been one of the priorities of my writing through the years, especially as I became more seasoned.”<sup>53</sup>

Dr. Ramsey is thorough with his pushback and criticism of cultural studies. As the 90s progressed, he wasn’t seeing the change he was hoping for.

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<sup>52</sup> Guthrie Ramsey, *Race Music: Black Cultures from Bebop to Hip-Hop* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003); Guthrie Ramsey *The Amazing Bud Powell: Black Genius, Jazz History, and the Challenge of Bebop* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2013).

<sup>53</sup> Guthrie P. Ramsey, Jr., *Who Hears Here? On Black Music Past and Present* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2022), 9.

The field of cultural studies and other clusters of contemporary theories have helped to create a highly specialized “speech community” (some would disparagingly call this speech “jargon”; I call it “scholarly slang”) among writers from numerous disciplines. Yet for all of its sophistication and the enthusiasm it inspires, a deafening silence exists in this literature, one that I believe threatens its healthy development in the present century. That silence is directly linked to the lack of [B]lack scholars in the academic music disciplines.<sup>54</sup>

From my point of view, the problem is an inability to describe music as sound and silence linked to mood, meaning, and culture, rather than an analysis of song text and the life of the artist or performer. I have noticed, even within my own family, that many African Americans reduce professional musicians only to performers and entertainers. This is why, as Ramsey continued to explain, there was a move from these Black music scholars “from the historical and practical to the theoretical and critical.”<sup>55</sup> The issue is that this “paradigm shift” has allowed cultural studies a way in, or a way to engage with Black music, without any oversight in regards to the “musical accuracy” of the work.

How successful Ramsey has or has not been in translating his work to other areas of the academy is not information I’m privy to, but with my foray into Black Music Research, which is the description I give to laypersons about my work I could tell the problem has not gone away. The exchange between Ramsey and Kernodle while talking through this topic reflected the call-and-response affirmation cadence one hears in the Black church. These exchanges happen unprompted and spontaneously when a poignant statement from the preacher is agreed upon and echoed by congregants. Ramsey, as the minister in this case, told Kernodle and the rest of us about the dual purpose of the Bud Powell book:

GM: I believe it’s an important cultural studies type study of a jazz figure. I was also trying to get my voice into other conversations outside of musicology.

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<sup>54</sup> Ramsey, *Who Hears Here?*, 45.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, 51.

Because I noticed that the people who were outside of the music fields who were writing on music, rarely cited..

TLK: Say it!

GM:...the Black scholars...

TLK: Say it!

GM:...in music studies.

TLK: Say it!

GM: It's almost as if we were on two different trajectories. So I was actually trying to get to be heard in the Black cultural studies wings of the music study people. That was what the Bud Powell book was to me.<sup>56</sup>

This disconnect is not imaginary. When misinformation pertaining to this very study has been printed in a reputable journal, undoing this intellectual damage can be daunting considering that a whole section of the academy refuses to acknowledge the work that Black scholars based in music departments do. Consequently, we are exposed to erroneous information. A well-meaning article in the journal *Southern Cultures* applies a mischaracterization of the arranging techniques and pedagogical approach of one of my former professors as a central argument of the piece.<sup>57</sup> This misinforming of readers widens the gap between the Black scholars with musical expertise and those without, but also damages the legacy of a well-respected musician and music educator.

I am not suggesting that we disregard the substantial work of scholars like Nelson George, Mark Anthony Neal, or Imani Perry, but I feel that the foundation of Black music

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<sup>56</sup> Eric Weisbard, "Guthrie Ramsey Jr. w/ Tammy Kernodle on Black Musics and Scholarship, PMBiP Series, 1/16/23," video, 27:14, YouTube, January 16, 2023, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=x6zEIrsxkiY&t=1653s>.

<sup>57</sup> Antron D. Mahoney, "Reclaiming the Beat: The Sweet Subversive Sounds of HBCU Marching Bands," *Southern Cultures* 27, no. 4 (2021): 84, <http://doi.org/10.1353/scu.2021.0059>; I forgot to tell my former professor Mr. Adams about the article when seeing him in April of 2023. I don't expect him to be pleased with what he reads in regards to how the author described the sound my professor sought to get from his student ensembles.

scholarship in Black intelligentsia should begin with those who cover the totality of Black musical practices, not just our commercial and popular music, and who have created this area of “Black musicology/ethnomusicology” from the ground up.<sup>58</sup> In Eileen Southern’s pioneering text *The Music of Black Americans*, she covers the culture of “cutting contest” with ragtime pianist and New Orleans brass bands, alluding to a culture of musical competition amongst Black music makers, which show-style bands still uphold.<sup>59</sup> Others in this pantheon of Black music scholarship whose work will reappear in conjunction with specific topics are Samuel A. Floyd Jr., Portia K. Maultsby, Mellonee V. Burnim, Cheryl L. Keyes, and George E. Lewis.<sup>60</sup> These authors have worked to describe African-American musical activities in various time periods and arenas. They make use of ethnographic and archival methodologies, matched with various philosophies that underline a wide array of what practitioners do. There is a coming together of ideas, styles, and foci that have all required the consumption of text, sound, and visual media for me to make sense of ethnographic work.

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<sup>58</sup> Nelson George, *Hip Hop America* (Penguin: New York, 2002); Mark Anthony Neal, *What The Music Said: Black Popular Music and Black Popular Culture* (New York: Routledge, 1999); Imani Perry, *Prophets of the Hood: Politics and Poetics in Hip-Hop* (Durham, Duke University Press, 2004).

<sup>59</sup> Eileen Southern, *The Music of Black Americans*, 3rd ed. (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1997), 341, 396–397.

<sup>60</sup> Samuel A. Floyd, *The Power of Black Music: Interpreting Its History from Africa to the United States* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995); Mellonee V. Burnim and Portia K. Maultsby, eds., *African American Music: An Introduction*, 1st ed. (New York: Routledge, 2005); Cheryl L. Keyes, *Rap Music and Street Consciousness* (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2002).

## The History of African Americans in Band and the Marching Arts

Casting a wide net facilitates and easier association between several types of ensembles that African Americans have historically participated in that could be classified as “band.” Many musicians in the HBCU bandworld traverse many different ensembles that make up a myriad of experiences that they bring with them as performers or educators. These sources reflect that variety.

African-American participation in military bands holds a place of prominence because of the numerous professional players and music educators that came through their ranks. According to Patrick Michael Jones, author of the dissertation “A History of the Arms Forces School of Music,” there has not been a complete study of pedagogical methods employed in the different branches of the armed forces, although historical accounts of the bands have been written. There are sections in three chapters covering the history of the schools of music of the Army, Navy, and Marines, with sections on African-American musicians, as well as information about teaching methods and curriculum.<sup>61</sup> The historical material Jones found is informative, but most of the information about the actual pedagogy is in the section about the Navy bands. There is mention of the links between the military and HBCUs, but these particulars were not explored in detail.

The most well-known African-American military bandmaster is James Reese Europe (1881–1919). His band, an extension of his unit officially known as the 369th Infantry Regiment of the American Expeditionary Force (AEF), nicknamed “The Harlem Hellfighters,” became internationally renowned for combining ragtime syncopated figures with familiar written

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<sup>61</sup> Patrick Michael Jones, “A History of the Armed Forces School of Music” (PhD diss., The Pennsylvania State University, 2002), 40, 63, 105, 135, <https://www.proquest.com/dissertations-theses/history-armed-forces-school-music/docview/305488617/se-2>.

melodies.<sup>62</sup> Dinwiddie, Brooks, and Gilbert all confirm a historical ethos of the Black marching band drawing from the Black vernacular music of the day, via the example of Europe.<sup>63</sup> It is in Europe's biography that we find information about his assistant bandmaster Francis Eugene Mikell, who trained at Tuskegee and what is now South Carolina State University, and who will be mentioned again.<sup>64</sup>

Early and later iterations of HBCUs would hire bandmasters recruited from the military as music educators. Floyd tells us of Alton Augustus Adams, the first Black Navy bandmaster, with his organization being the first Naval Band of African Americans in 1917.<sup>65</sup> He declined to take over James Reese Europe's band after his death, or to teach at Hampton Institute/Hampton University. Floyd also details the relationship between working jazz musicians, military bandsmen, and HBCUs in the article "The Great Lakes Experience: 1942–1945."<sup>66</sup> The segregated musicians were under the direction of bandmaster Leonard L. Bowdon, who entered the Navy during WWII as a seasoned professional. The main reason he was chosen to lead was that he had taken over the band at Tuskegee Institute as a student, in the absence of a teacher. Floyd makes a point of stating that some Black musicians stationed at Great Lakes had studied at Julliard, Eastman, and the Curtis Institute, but "concert and marching bands at [B]lack colleges also contributed to the high musical proficiency of those entering the Navy in the 1940s."<sup>67</sup>

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<sup>62</sup> Michael D. Dinwiddie, "World War I: The Harlem Hellfighters," in *Music and War in the United States*, 1st edition, ed. Sarah Mahler Kraaz (United Kingdom: Routledge, 2018), 123, <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315194981>.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*, 124; David Gilbert, "Clef Club Inc.: James Reese Europe and New York's Musical Marketplace," *Journal of Popular Music Studies* 24, Issue 4 (2012): 439, <https://doi.org/10.1111/jpms.12002>; Tim Brooks, *Lost Sounds: Blacks and the Birth of the Recording Industry 1890–1919* (Urbana-Champaign: University of Illinois, 2005), 280.

<sup>64</sup> Reid Badger, *A Life in Ragtime: A Biography of James Reese Europe* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), 148.

<sup>65</sup> Samuel A. Floyd, "Alton Augustus Adams: The First Black Bandmaster in the U.S. Navy," *The Black Perspective in Music* 5, no. 2 (1977): 173–187, <https://doi.org/10.2307/1214078>.

<sup>66</sup> Samuel A. Floyd, "The Great Lakes Experience: 1942–45," *The Black Perspective in Music* 3, no. 1 (1975): 17–24, <https://doi.org/10.2307/1214375>.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*, 20.

There are several texts about military/conservatory-trained musicians who associated with Black-serving educational entities at different points in their lives. These institutions served as one of several places to find work, in what we identify now as a portfolio career.<sup>68</sup> At various times in their lives, these musicians were private studio instructors, community band leaders, or professional performers. Peter M. Lefferts offers information about esteemed musicians Eugene Mikell, Walter H. Loving, N. Clark Smith, and Lieutenant F. L. Drye, known as Captain Frank Drye, who were all associated with helping to establish HBCU bands in the late nineteenth to twentieth centuries.<sup>69</sup>

The literature reflects, however, that a historical understanding of the modern legacy and methodology of HBCU marching band starts with William Patrick “Pops” Foster, and his tenure at FAMU directing the Marching 100. With the Dr. William P. and Mary Ann Foster Foundation, his obituary running in *The New Times* and *Los Angeles Times*, a biography written by the music educator, a Hal Leonard published book on band pageantry, archival collections of his papers at University of Kansas and University of Maryland, and a FAMU documentary released in 2016, his legacy as an American Bandmaster is fully intact.<sup>70</sup> Multiple dissertations

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<sup>68</sup> Bartleet Brydie-Leigh, Christina Ballico, Dawn Bennett, Ruth Bridgstock, Paul Draper, Vanessa Tomlinson, and Scott Harrison, “Building Sustainable Portfolio Careers in Music: Insights and Implications for Higher Education” *Music Education Research*, 21, no. 3 (2019): 282–294, <https://doi.org/10.1080/14613808.2019.1598348>.

<sup>69</sup> Peter M. Lefferts, “U.S. Army Black Regimental Bands and the Appointments of Their First Black Bandmasters,” *Black Music Research Journal* 33, no. 2 (2013): 157, 168, <https://www.muse.jhu.edu/article/538628>; Peter M. Lefferts, “A Chronology and Itinerary of the Career of Eugene Mikell: Materials for a Biography,” *Faculty Publications: School of Music* 60 (2016): 2, 4, <https://digitalcommons.unl.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1061&context=musicfacpub>.

<sup>70</sup> Dr. William P. & Mary Ann Foster Foundation, <http://www.drwpfosterfoundation.org/home.html>; William P. Foster, *The Man Behind the Baton: The Maestro, The Law, The Legend* (South Carolina: Advantage Media Group, 2016); William P. Foster, *Band Pageantry: A Guide For the Marching Band* (Winona: Hal Leonard, 1968); Brandi Mitchell, *Point and Drive*, Self-Released, 2016.

and articles are written about his innovations in pageantry, and the inclusion of African-American vernacular dance that has influenced show-style band presentation.<sup>71</sup>

### Race, Aesthetics, and the Marching Arts

Unfortunately, a sense of pride in one's culture can be limiting and put shackles on the types of expression you want to display. A legislation of one's Blackness, based on the style of band presented, now takes place on social media, with folks simultaneously arguing that we are not monolithic, but then demanding a type of musical expression that is. Band alumni, band parents, bandheads, and administrators all weigh in. If a positive attribute of participating in a show-style band is enjoying a connection to the public, then the attitudes that show-style band participants endure if they are not deemed Black enough represents the negative side of the equation. The criticism is almost never steeped in historical accuracy, or given with an understanding or appreciation for diverse types of marching arts presentation. I uncovered degrees of racial animus in my research emanating from several sectors. This varied from outwardly stated to passive, non-verbal expressions of racism.

Drum and Bugle Corps, Drum Corps, DCI, and PWI band are all euphemisms for "White sounding" or "White musical activity" in the Black bandworld, with Hip-Hop often acting as a proxy for Black.<sup>72</sup> Realistically, there are several iterations of band presentation that don't adhere

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<sup>71</sup> Clifford Edward Watkins, "The Works of Three Selected Band Directors in Predominantly-Black American Colleges and Universities" (PhD diss., Southern Illinois University, 1975); Nicolas Brandon Thomas, "William Patrick Foster: Dean of African American Bandmasters" (PhD diss., University of Georgia, 2013); Richard L. Walker, Jr., "The Life and Leadership of William P. Foster: The Maestro and the Legend" (PhD diss., Indiana State University, 2014); Samuel Lafabion Rowley, "William Patrick Foster and His Impact on African American Wind Band Conductors" (D.Ed. diss., Teachers College, Columbia University, 2013), <https://media.proquest.com/cdn/media/pg/classic/doc/2955110041/fmt/ai/rep/NPDF?tm=1596252601729&cfs=kU6pBfgj79Gulvg97ZX2qqxn0zB77gMiRBdC87ZEIT1%3D>.

<sup>72</sup> DCI, or Drum Corps International, is the most prominent governing body of member non-profit music educational organizations that manage a circuit for 14–21-year-olds to tour and be adjudicated over the summer months on show material they rehearse during winter and spring. They have also sponsored solo and ensemble competitions for corps members. What is relatively new, however, are the head-to-head drumline battles, which gained popularity due to show-style ensembles being in the mediaspace, but whose inspiration went

to stylistic boundaries of corps-style and show-style, as they are defined to HBCU band or DCI aficionados. Again, the amount of objectivity needed to accept these nuances is beyond many bandheads and drum corps fanatics, as social media comments often show. The Marching Trojans from the University of Southern California (USC), for all intents and purposes, is a show-style band, but isn't thought of as such. The community of alumni and the sports and entertainment executives who hire them don't define them in that way. They employ a high knee-lift marching style, utilize popular culture and song selections, have a prominent dance team with the Song Girls, and execute dance routines. The USC athletic department recently sanctioned the Cardinal Divas, an HBCU-inspired majorette dance team that went viral, whose members are seeking performance time during the field shows. The band from Tulane University, in New Orleans, is a PWI group that marches in various Mardi Gras parades every year. They embrace the city's Black musical influences in a way many PWIs do not. The band from the University of Memphis also follows suit for their location.

Meanwhile, HBCUs have taken ideas from drum corps as well. The original style of Mississippi Valley University, an HBCU in the Mississippi delta, contained this influence, and the North Carolina A&T drumline "Cold Steel" prides themselves as taking a "best of both worlds" approach in mixing traditional and corps-style concepts.<sup>73</sup> There is also the phenomenon of HBCU graduates obtaining employment as assistant band directors or Director of Band positions at PWIs, and starting to include ideas or concepts from show-style bands into these ensembles. Even with all of this melding of influences and cultural exchange, Kimberly Marshall

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unacknowledged when officials explained the rationale for this activities addition. I participated in the Sacramento Freelancers Drum and Bugle Corps in 1990, which was the same year he saw an HBCU marching band for the first time.

<sup>73</sup> BGMM Media, "NCAT - Full PASIC 2016 Cold Steel Clinic: The Best of Both Worlds," video, 57:41, December 14, 2016, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9mG7ZIXjiCk>.

Bohannon still supports the characterization of marching band participation as “a [W]hite, middle-class, high GPA student activity that falls among social norms that adults approve of,” in her thesis entitled “Marching Band As Culture: Aesthetics, Identity, and Representation.”<sup>74</sup> With her rendering of the activity, Black aesthetics in band are situated as counter-cultural, with African-American practices deemed non-normative, until they are centered and adopted in some way by mainstream culture.

Joshua D. Gailey’s work relates directly to Bohannon. In his dissertation he displays the association between the beginning of the public school band movement and the fear adults felt about the effects that Black music could have on children. The participation in both music appreciation and in band “was championed [by music teachers] as a pedagogical solution of the delinquency aimed primarily at [W]hite, middle-class boys.”<sup>75</sup> It was the promotion of the debated term of “good music,” a term also used by African Americans during the Progressive era, that referred to the Western Art music canon. “The most consistent definitions” were agreed upon for “what ‘good music’ was *not*: namely, African-American popular music like ragtime and, later, jazz, which certain [W]hite audiences considered to have a morally corrupting influence. Given the nature of their profession, music educators were often among the most vocal advocates for ‘good music,’ which they wished to see implemented in domestic settings as well as in school curricula. Their descriptions of ‘bad’ music were often explicitly racialized.”<sup>76</sup>

As mentioned earlier, rejection of Black popular music by individuals at African American-serving institutions who held elitist ideals has been well documented. In his book

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<sup>74</sup> Kimberly Marshall Bohannon, “Marching Band As Culture: Aesthetics, Identity, and Representation,” (master’s thesis, University of Oregon, 2004), 4.

<sup>75</sup> Joshua D. Gailey, “Beginning Bands Progressive Reform and the Birth of the American School-Band Industry, 1907–1940” (PhD diss., Yale University, 2019), abstract.

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*, 29.

about the Black arts community of St. Louis, Benjamin Looker reported on problems that trumpeter Lester Bowie and saxophonist Julius Hemphill experienced at Lincoln University. David Robertson detailed the tumultuous time of W. C. Handy during his short teaching tenure at Alabama A&M, because of his programming of ragtime, despite composer Charles Ives also incorporating the style into his works.<sup>77</sup> Composer Ann Ward, also a member of the AACM, told George E. Lewis in the late 1960s that studying gospel music at Kentucky State University was seen as uncultured, and the formation of a gospel choir was seen as an act of resistance, as was studying contemporary European-American composers like John Cage.<sup>78</sup> D. Antoinette Handy found Black sentiments that were the same as those expressed by twentieth-century White music educators in Gailey. Black institutions encouraged ‘elite art’ instrumental music and its production in ensembles at schools as well known as Hampton Institute (Virginia) and as little known as Alcorn State College (Mississippi). In the first decades of this century, the orchestra of Haines Normal and Industrial Institute in Augusta, Georgia, provided ‘good music’ for [B]lack and [W]hite residents of the state.”<sup>79</sup> Lester Bowie was much more explicit: “These f\*\*king [B]lack colleges should be meccas for art. I mean all the arts, photography, and painting. People would be coming from all over the f\*\*king world at Fisk or Tuskegee if they had the bad motherf\*\*kers the f\*\*king music and s\*\*t. That’s our contribution to society, our art.”<sup>80</sup>

Perhaps unknown, American collegiate music education in general shows a rift between the marching arts, which is the primary ensemble American student musicians participate in, and music departments that try to mold themselves in the conservatory model. Black music

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<sup>77</sup> Benjamin Looker, “Point From Which Creation Begins”: *The Black Artists’ Group of St. Louis* (St. Louis: University of Missouri Press, 2004); Robertson, *W. C. Handy*, 81.

<sup>78</sup> George E. Lewis, *A Power Stronger Than Itself: The AACM and American Experimental Music* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2008), 463.

<sup>79</sup> D. Antoinette Handy, *Black Women in American Bands and Orchestras* (Metuchen: Scarecrow Press, 1981), 8.

<sup>80</sup> Lewis, *A Power Stronger Than Itself*, 549.

educators, however, see band as a premier educational model. Many of them would use The Ohio State University Band and the University of Michigan Marching Band as an example in style, sound, and pageantry, and combine this with African-American influences. A dissertation by John Fuller sheds light on this connection.<sup>81</sup> Watkins, and Lloyd, would report on the effect both bands had on Frank Terry Greer, the Tennessee State University (TnSU) graduate, the second Director of Bands hired, and the eventual music department chair.<sup>82</sup> Greer commented in letters on being impressed with Ohio State after attending their rehearsals and performances, when teaching high school band in West Virginia between 1948 to 1951, and incorporating some of their techniques.<sup>83</sup> While at TnSU, he suggested that students attend graduate school at Michigan because African Americans were unable to seek advanced degrees at schools in the South, and because of his immense respect for Dr. William Revelli (University of Michigan Director of Bands, 1935–1971).<sup>84</sup> Greer hired four assistant band directors<sup>84</sup> from the institution between 1954 and 1972; the first was Chief Arranger Anceo Francisco, from 1954 to 1960.<sup>85</sup> Although Francisco helped the band achieve a symphonic sound that Greer sought from the Michigan influence, Tennessee State had a legacy of dance bands before the marching band became prominent. This area of hybridity reported in the literature is one of the unique features of show-style bands, and displays an expectation of students being able to internalize and

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<sup>81</sup> John Fuller, "A Descriptive Analysis of the Eleven Big Ten Conference Marching Band Programs" (PhD diss., Ohio State University, 1995), <https://etd.ohiolink.edu/>.

<sup>82</sup> Michael Lloyd, "The Life and Legacy of Frank Terry Greer and His Influences on Historically Black College and University Bands" (master's thesis, University of Florida, 2016), 27, <https://ufdc.ufl.edu/AA00061636/0000>.

<sup>83</sup> Watkins, "The Works of Three Selected Band Directors," 52.

<sup>84</sup> To help put the discrimination of PWIs in the South in context, I offer the example of music educator Mary Francis Early. She is the first African American to earn a graduate degree from University of Georgia. I met her in 2014, on a visit to UGA, at a talk sponsored by the Black Graduate Student Organization. I am not addressing ancient history, but relatively recent history. To UGA's credit, they own this history and champion Professor Early for her continued support of the university. <https://maryfrancesearly.coe.uga.edu/>.

<sup>85</sup> Lloyd, "The Life and Legacy," 28.

execute sounds from various cultural sources. Starting with Francisco, “a pedigree of jazz influenced arrangers has been a staple of the Aristocrat of Bands since Greer’s leadership. The band has had multiple Chief Arrangers that have all had an extensive background in jazz, with most of them gaining their experience from TnSU, with Larry Jenkins as the most current.”<sup>86</sup>

Scholarship from Groulx and, again, from McNair III explores not just the aesthetics of race in band, but the actual conditions that exist when an ecosystem is maintained because of the legalized segregation of the past, and present-day segregated schools due to socioeconomic differences.<sup>87</sup> Governing bodies, such as the Florida Band Masters Association (FBA), have adjudicated segregated student band competitions since the 1950s. The Florida Association for Band Directors, created for African-American students, merged with FBA in the mid-1960s, but not without discriminatory problems, which Groulx details in his articles. One specific example cites recorded evidence encouraging “that [B]lack band” to get a low score, before they performed, without proper recourse taken.<sup>88</sup> Howard University graduate, and former band director for TxSU, Darryl Singleton offers research in this vein in his dissertation, “Black band for Brown Students.” He documents experiences of students in Houston, Texas, with Mexican and Central American ancestry who now find themselves in high school and collegiate show-style bands. He explains that Latin pop music can be integrated into show-style presentation along with Hip-Hop, but also reports on the consequences for doing so, alluding to race. Texas marching arts educators and adjudicating bodies who consist of mainly White individuals

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<sup>86</sup> Ibid., 36.

<sup>87</sup> Timothy J. Groulx, “Influences of Segregation and Desegregation on the Bands at Historically Black High Schools of Hillsborough County, Florida,” *Journal of Historical Research in Music Education* 37, no. 2 (April 2016): 129–149, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1536600616638793>; McNair III, “Teaching Marching Band In Urban Schools.”

<sup>88</sup> Timothy J. Groulx, “Influences of Segregation and Integration on the Bands at Historically Black High Schools in Duval County, Florida,” *Journal of Historical Research in Music Education* 40, no. 1 (2018): 74–75, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1536600617720760>.

continue to passively marginalize these ensembles during competitions by insisting that there aren't any rules against show-style techniques and repertoire, but by also not hiring assessors familiar with the nuances of these bands.<sup>89</sup> They also refuse to create a category especially for show-style bands, similar to military-style bands.

Robert H. Clark's "A Narrative History of African American Marching Band: Toward A Historicultural Understanding" should be required reading for such adjudicators. His findings detail the value system in place that allowed Hip-Hop to be easily integrated into band life and sound, and an underlying ethos that many groups share. "Characteristics identified in his study specific to the style of African-American marching bands include a unique ensemble sound, a commingling of military and modern styles in drill and musical repertoire, distinctive marching fundamentals, dancing, an 'informal' competitive spirit, and a proposed African aesthetic of Angularity and Asymmetry."<sup>90</sup>

However, it is a thesis by Claire Milburn, entitled "An Oral History of Marching Band Traditions at Historically Black Colleges and Universities," that has proven most crucial to my study in this area.<sup>91</sup> In her interrogating the meaning of her own time as student arranger and band member at NSU and JSU, links between band and Hip-Hop are made explicit. In the ethnographic interviews she conducted with past and present directors of Southern, JSU, and NSU, she asked direct questions about their ideas regarding Hip-Hop's use as repertoire for the band and playing techniques associated with its execution. She and I have shared educational

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<sup>89</sup> Darryl Marc Singleton, "Black Band for Brown Students: A Culturally Relevant Pedagogy?," (DMA diss., Boston University, 2020), 6.

<sup>90</sup> Robert H. Clark, "A Narrative History of African American Marching Band: Toward A Historicultural Understanding," *Journal of Historical Research in Music Education* 41, no. 1 (October 2019): 9, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1536600619847933>; Clark capitalizes Angularity and Asymmetry as a nod to Zora Neale Hurston in *The Sanctified Church*, 54–56.

<sup>91</sup> Claire Milburn, "An Oral History of Marching Band Traditions at Historically Black Colleges and Universities" (Master's thesis, Louisiana State University, 2019).

experiences and instructional personnel. Her words deeply resonated with my research agenda, and were also able to offer a contrasting view of a band aesthetic, garnered from her time at Louisiana State University. As a result she helped to provide a proper nuance for the topics considered here of Hip-Hop, race, and culture.

### Hip-Hop History, Culture, and Techniques

Southerners have had to fight for their rightful place in Hip-Hop – because of a New York bias that people carry – but have earned a rightful place in the discourse of American music-making. This is where the disconnect occurs. It doesn't make sense that Hip-Hop would not be made in the image of musicians from the South because of the long-standing musical traditions that already existed in the region before Hip-Hop's existence. Although I define Hip-Hop broadly, texts by Sarig and Westhoff, focused on the Southern Hip-Hop experience, still represent the culture under the umbrella of two perspectives: Hip-Hop in the South manifests itself as both a lived, grassroots, event-based, counter-cultural music, art, and dance practice, simultaneously steeped in both multiethnicity and Blackness; and as a music and media-based industry, which is now mainstream culture, and racialized as Black in the manner of said industry.<sup>92</sup> It isn't that *Can't Stop Won't Stop* by Jeff Chang no longer applies to this study, but it is through the lens of Regina N. Bradley, Charlie Braxton, and Valerie Cassell Oliver, in *The Dirty South: Contemporary Art, Material Culture, and the Sonic Impulse*, that I need to gander, listen, document, and report.<sup>93</sup> The South already factors into instrumentalism and Hip-Hop more than New York, and Southerners see it as a continuation of, and not a break in Black musical

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<sup>92</sup> Roni Sarig, *Third Coast: Outkast, Timbaland, and How Hip-hop Became a Southern Thing* (Cambridge: De Capo Press, 2007); Ben Westhoff, *Dirty South: OutKast, Lil Wayne, Soulja Boy, and the Southern Rappers Who Reinvented Hip-Hop* (Chicago: Chicago Review Press, 2011).

<sup>93</sup> Jeff Chang, *Can't Stop Won't Stop: A History of the Hip-Hop Generation* (New York: St. Martin Press, 2005); Valerie Cassel Oliver, ed., *The Dirty South: Contemporary Art, Material Culture, and the Sonic Impulse* (Durham: Virginia Museum of Fine Arts/Duke University Press, 2021).

expression. This was communicated fluently by emcee, native of Port Arthur, Texas, and Rice University lecturer Bun B:

....Most Southern producers are heavily influenced by gospel, blues, and early R&B. We pretty much made a lot of the music we listened to. For a long time we didn't really notice it, but now that we are more cognizant of it, we try to put as much influence into it as we can, just to give our music more of its own personal distinction....Southern artists, more than artists of any other region, use live instrumentation in their music, and a lot of that comes from the fact that most musicians are from the South. There's a guitar player everywhere you look. There is a certain thickness when you listen to Southern music. There is a thickness in it that comes from the strings of the guitar, the strings of the bass guitar, the keys on the piano – it is a different sound and that basically comes from the music that we listened to coming up.<sup>94</sup>

Though instrumentalism was connected to Hip-Hop by Southern practitioners and scholars, they rarely explained the methodology behind it – especially not from a player's or music teacher's point of view. Sentiment expressed earlier by Big DeMo, in *Houston Rap Tapes*, relays the symbiotic relationship between marching ensembles and Hip-Hop, but Mikey Hess, in *Hip Hop in America: A Regional Guide*, was one of the first national writers to address this directly:

In the Hampton Roads area, high school bands are a staple of the African American and Hip-Hop experience. The marching band takes on a role of its own as it becomes a weekly form of entertainment, where new music is introduced, and oldie-but-goodies are celebrated. The concept of the high school band in the Hampton Roads area is not a new one. In fact, marching bands have long been a form of entertainment that has been synonymous with the hip hop experience. It's not unusual to go to a high school or college football game and find that the majority of the audience is anticipating the band performance, more than the athletic performance taking place on the football field.

Understanding the role of high school and college marching bands on the Hampton Roads' Hip-Hop scene is imperative if one hopes to understand Hampton Roads' Hip-Hop music...Manor High School, the school which Missy

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<sup>94</sup> Davide Bortot, "Bun B," *Red Bull Music Academy Interview*, transcript and video, 02:20:20, 2008, <https://www.redbullmusicacademy.com/lectures/bun-b-grinder-country>.

Elliot attended, often made a showing at the “Battle of the Bands” sponsored by Hampton Roads’ most popular marching band, Norfolk State University.<sup>95</sup>

In *Black Noise*, Tricia Rose provides several layered arguments as to why Hip-Hop as a culture deserves to be a topic of critical and musical examination. It was Hip-Hop as sound, and its assessed musical value, that had caused eyebrows to raise in my own undergraduate music department. It is here where Rose’s candidness makes clear why she, coming from American Studies, felt a need to do this work, after she was introduced to and summarized her research aims to a chairman of a different music department:

“Well you must be writing on rap’s social impact and political lyrics, because there’s nothing to the music...They ride down the street at 2:00am with it blasting from car speakers, and (they) wake up my wife and kids”...For the music chairman, automobiles with massive speakers blaring bass and drum heavy beats looped continuously served as an explanation for the insignificance of the music and diminished rap’s lyrical and political salience as well. The music was “nothing” to him on the grounds of its apparent “simplicity” and “repetitiveness.” Rap music was also “noise” to him, unintelligible yet aggressive sound that disrupted his familial domain and his sonic territory.<sup>96</sup>

Leaning on low-end frequencies, and using aggression, is a way HBCU bands play, and sketching lines to show Hip-Hop’s influence on the ensembles is where ideas from Rose contribute to my work. Cheryl L. Keyes, too, spends time analyzing the low-end sound, with regards to texture, timbre, place, and gear, in *Rap Music and Street Consciousness*.<sup>97</sup>

### Taste, Timbre, and Genre

In the business of music, areas of taste, timbre, and genre are not automatically classified by race and culture, but these elements do factor into consideration when industry forces

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<sup>95</sup> Walker, *Houston Rap Tapes*, 241–242; Mikey Hess, *Hip Hop in America: A Regional Guide [2 Volumes]* (Santa Barbara, CA: Greenwood, 2010), 496.

<sup>96</sup> Tricia Rose, *Black Noise: Rap Music and Black Culture in Contemporary America* (Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 1994), 63.

<sup>97</sup> Keyes, *Rap Music and Street Consciousness*, 147.

determine how music is marketed, sold, and received by consumers. Karl Hagstrom Miller, in *Segregating Sound*, details the development of the “color line” in Southern music and explores “the transformation in the meaning and symbolic power of southern music between the 1880s and the 1920s.”<sup>98</sup> “In a process Miller calls segregating sound, a variety of people – scholars and artists, industrialists and consumers – came to compartmentalize southern music according to race. Although Miller hears a fluid complex of sounds and styles in practice in the music itself, the music was reduced to a series of distinct genres associated with particular racial and ethnic identities by those in power.”<sup>99</sup>

Marching band music escapes industry interference because it isn’t thought of as being popular enough to warrant attention, but the consumers who do engage with bands, in this case the bandheads, also influence them as listeners. Reports from Joshua Snell about the meaning of music to students at the Atlanta University Center (AUC) triggered the idea of band music in and of itself being a genre.<sup>100</sup> I then found it necessary to consult popular music scholars Holt and Lena, who specialize in the topic, to support this theme.<sup>101</sup>

When turning to areas of taste and timbre, I lean heavily on ethnographic material, but scholarly writing does lay some groundwork, starting with Maultsby. Her descriptions of Afro-Diasporic sound quality, in *Africanisms in American Culture*, match aural gestures heard in show-style bands that African-American instrumentalists embody in some arrangements. These

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<sup>98</sup> Karl Hagstrom Miller, *Segregating Sound: Inventing Folk and Pop Music in the Age of Jim Crow* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010), 2.

<sup>99</sup> Ibid.

<sup>100</sup> The institutions that comprise the Atlanta University Center (AUC) are Morehouse College, Spelman College, Clark Atlanta University, Morris Brown College, and The Morehouse School of Medicine.

<sup>101</sup> Fabian Holt, *Genre in Popular Music* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007); Jennifer C. Lena, *Banding Together: How Communities Create Genres in Popular Music* (Princeton University Press, 2012), <http://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt7rrzb>.

sounds are present even when students and band directors don't always have a tendency to verbalize such practices.

In Africa and throughout the diaspora, [B]lack musicians produce an array of unique sounds, many of which imitate those of nature, animals, spirits, and speech...Musicians bring intensity to their performance by alternating lyrical, percussive, and raspy timbres; juxtaposing vocal and instrumental texture; changing pitch and dynamic levels; alternating straight with vibrato tones; and weaving moans, shouts, grunts, hollers, and screams into the melody. The arbitrary notion of beauty has resulted in descriptions of [B]lack music as “weird,” “strange,” “noise,” “yelling,” “hollering,” “hooting,” “screaming.” The use of these words clearly indicates that the [B]lack music tradition does not adhere to European-American aesthetic values.<sup>102</sup>

The concept of a “taste culture,” which is a classification the Black bandworld perpetuates, is defined in the *International Encyclopedia of the Social and Behavioral Sciences*.<sup>103</sup> There are variations in show-style band techniques indicating that subcultures have emerged. These can be divided using the dimensions of musical taste, which are clarified by George H. Lewis, but in the minds of bandheads, preference in band sound correlates to the athletic conference the band is a member of.<sup>104</sup> Although bands in the CIAA, SIACC, and non-HBCU conferences are also in play, the divisions lie between the SWAC and the MEAC, with two prominent bands defining the sounds for aficionados – Southern, which has come to define the SWAC sound, is brass-heavy, bright, and aggressive, while FAMU defines the MEAC sound, which is musical because of the attention paid to intonation, balance, and blend.<sup>105</sup> Nolan

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<sup>102</sup> Portia K. Maulsby, “Africanisms in African-American Music,” In *Africanisms in American Culture*, ed. Joseph E. Holloway (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1990), 191–192.

<sup>103</sup> Michèle Ollivier and Viviana Fridman, “Taste/Taste Culture,” *International Encyclopedia of the Social and Behavioral Sciences*, eds. Neil J. Smelser and Paul B. Baltes (Oxford: Pergamon, 2001), 15442–15447, <https://doi.org/10.1016/B0-08-043076-7/04382-5>.

<sup>104</sup> George H. Lewis, “Who Do You Love? The Dimensions of Musical Taste,” in *Popular Music and Communication*, 2nd edition, ed. James Lull (Newbury Park: Sage, 1992), 134–151.

<sup>105</sup> The Southwestern Athletic Conference (SWAC) and the Mid-Eastern Athletic Conference (MEAC) were the two largest and most prominent HBCU athletic conferences before schools started leaving the MEAC. The philosophical differences between the two conferences are explained as aggressive (SWAC) versus polite (MEAC). There are other HBCU conferences and bands like Tennessee State University and North Carolina A&T that are no longer affiliated with HBCU-only entities.

Gasser's work is needed here when classifying taste by using the metadata of music as the rationale behind our enjoyment of it, instead of declarative statements and assumptions made about certain bands and their style of play.

## **Chapter Overview**

This introductory chapter sets the foundation for the study, with the framework, rationale, methodology, limitations, considerations of gender, and a literature review.

In Chapter 1, I introduce the unfamiliar to the Black bandworld through the process called world-building. I start by using autobiographical material from my past and compare it with those who were exposed to this universe before college. Within the ecosystem of show-style bands, ensembles at HBCUs receive the majority of the attention because of the need to establish these programs as the nucleus of this activity and the cultural work being done. The Black college campus can seem like a spirited, living entity, where music is used to give life-force. DJs and the marching bands are sources of energy felt by the students on campus, by the people living in the neighborhoods bordering them, by attendees at events sponsored by campus organizations, and by students studying music with HBCU alumni wherever they are located. The suggestion that band music can be considered a genre is a foreign concept to many, but through frequenting events, completing soundwalks, and other means of data collection, I found Hip-Hop, DJs, band, and Blackness to be intertwined in specific situations that are commonplace to Black Southerners.

Tricia Rose writes about Hip-Hop producers and engineers revising musical traditions using technology and machines – I take her concept, and reverse it. Acoustic instruments in a marching ensemble, that are thought to be passe, are used to revoice and rework Hip-Hop in a manner that was unthinkable on the east or west coast. In Chapter 2, I use Rose's description of

Hip-Hop engineers who “work in the red,” or the indication of the music distorting, to serve as a metaphor when discussing the manner in which many show-style bands play when interpreting their written music. Although scores of White engineers have admonished African-American Hip-Hop practitioners of being “wrong” and having an incorrect approach to recording, their methodology has now become standard practice. I equate what’s known as “cranking” first as a performance, and then as a way of writing or altering written music, using the concept of working in the red.<sup>106</sup> This distinction is important because although I cite a few interlocutor viewpoints on cranking as a style of writing, my deep-dive into arranging is reserved for Chapter 4. It is sound that I’m mainly concerned with here, and how the way the music is written or altered by the players leads to the racialized construction of aural material. I use Rose as a springboard because the band projects a sound that represents both the historical and contemporary African-American South.

I feel that while cranking is an aesthetic choice in taste and timbre, there is a negotiation between Blackness and Whiteness at play dependent upon bands who choose to indulge or abstain from partaking in the practice. I also found that there isn’t one steadfast interpretation for what it means for musicians to crank, even though I tried to generate one, which means that criteria cannot be established that would allow for deliberations of race to take place. I attempt to maintain a place of impartiality in contrast to the divisions that cranking has caused in the African-American bandworld, with bandheads and music educators arguing over its inherent value. I pose an argument that if Blackness is to be assigned to sound, then there are multiple

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<sup>106</sup> Crank, cranking, and krankin’ are all descriptive iterations of the performance practice and arranging style that defines the sound of some show-style bands to both members and aficionados. There is not one agreed-upon definition of the term. Those who view it positively describe musicians playing with good tone, volume, and aggression, and arrangers writing primarily brass parts out of the practical range of the instruments. Those who view it negatively say it’s simply overblowing and playing parts written outside of the natural character of the instruments.

ways to express this culturally. The aesthetic of the Florida A&M Marching 100 seems to be a dividing line because as an ensemble, it has determined that they do not crank. While I encourage fans of their band to keep an open mind with regard to the performance practice, I also detail successful moments that FAMU has reached by forging their own path.

Material in Chapter 3 covers four related themes that are presented in pairs: aggression, battling, the need to entertain, and the mission of educating. The Black bandworld differs significantly from mainstream marching arts practices when it comes to confrontational behavior via band presentation being ingrained in students from the beginning. Sports tropes and ties to the military are shared throughout band culture, as examples of some similarities, and the assumption that show-style bands will battle each other encourages a kind of assertiveness that is found amongst these groups. While sponsored and ticketed battles occur more frequently than they used to, battles take place mainly attached to sporting events or in conjunction with parades, depending on the style of group (secondary, tertiary, or summer band).

Students in the Black bandworld also discover how much pressure there is for them to entertain audiences. These secondary and tertiary groups are at different developmental levels, and the tempestuous feelings of educators who are trying to balance entertaining versus educating is spoken about often. Truthfully, like in everything else, social media influences the bandworld and affects recruitment, with media teams recording and posting performances. Students share YouTube stand battle clips with each other and band members will even stream their performances on Instagram. Reaction shows have been created to score battles, sometimes publicly judging bands in harsh language, while inviting band members online to debate and talk trash. With all of these iterations of content, there are real-time viewer interactions, on various platforms, providing running commentary. Band directors themselves are not immune to the

constant demands and judgment they receive from bandheads and/or administrators in regard to all of these issues, with some of them being accused of becoming too performative. Hip-Hop, too, is a factor because of the overwhelming entertainment value it holds for some bandheads, even though its educational worth is in doubt.

Chapter 4 is lengthy, but detailed in addressing the position, learning processes, and repertoire considerations of arrangers in the Black bandworld. They are, as I state later, part of a culture within a culture, due to them being the conduit through which the music transforms from its original form to band music. Interlocutors shared different pathways of learning techniques for writing, with failure being a huge part of the educational process. Hip-Hop tunes are not totally maligned or championed by arrangers, but there is a feeling that these songs don't offer much material for them to build upon. I broach the subject of modern songwriting, which proves that rhythmically constructed songs in general have prompted arrangers to compose riffs and motifs, instead of enhancing what's already on the track. Different opinions are offered about this practice, and JSU alum and Texas Southern's Chief Arranger Trenton Hunter took me through an in-depth analysis of some techniques he uses for writing. This exercise provided insight into why certain compositional devices have led to some arrangements being labeled formulaic, and Hunter discussed his strategy to prevent such criticisms. Finally, discussion of who arrangers are falls to the singular person who writes the woodwind and brass parts, while the creativeness that comes from the percussion section, when it comes to part-writing, usually goes uncredited. The collaborative process between arrangers and the drumline that occurs in order to create parts is another layer of culture – a subculture, if you will – in this musical environment. It is a clash between the aural and written, because parts can be created by ear or written out. Instructors try to give students the opportunity to contribute ideas, often depending

on students to incorporate the latest musical trends, but educators also don't want to reinforce the stereotype that Black percussionists can't read. I detail my own experience in Jackson State's War and Thunder drum section, displaying the various methodologies that we used to create drum parts.

## Chapter 1: BAND + WORLD-BUILDING = BANDWORLD-BUILDING

World-building is the process of using fictional history, culture, and events to construct a universe.<sup>107</sup> The African-American bandworld is certainly not fictional, but it is a series of primary, secondary, tertiary, and community-based ensembles and auxiliary units that, until recently, maintained a closed subculture outside of the national African-American consciousness, or to the non-Black Southerner.<sup>108</sup> People outside of the Black community had some awareness of this ecosystem, but their engagement ranged from full participation, to displaying a wholehearted disdain, or to passive-aggressive dismissal of the culture though ignoring it. For many people, viewing these ensembles is the primary reason for attending football games.

One of the challenges of my dissertation work is in using autoethnographic techniques to extract data from my own experiences, as a means of integrating them into those of others, with a seamlessness that induces a continuous stream of consciousness that engages and informs the reader. I rely on the self-reflexive tools modeled by Ruth Behar and Jessica B. Harris, but instead of focusing on food and family, I interrogate my own relationship with music and the marching arts, and use concepts from William C. Banfield as a structure for all the detailed material. Researching two entities that are interpreted as being as far apart as band and Hip-Hop requires exploration, or what Banfield refers to as “an analysis of cultural environments that gave rise to various traditions.”<sup>109</sup>

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<sup>107</sup> “What is ‘World-Building’? And How Do You Spell It?” <https://www.merriam-webster.com/words-at-play/what-is-world-building#:~:text=In%20the%2019th%20century%2C%20'world,an%20entirely%20new%20fictional%20world.>

<sup>108</sup> Auxiliary units are baton twirlers, color guard members, and majorette/dance teams.

<sup>109</sup> William C. Banfield, *Cultural Codes: Makings of a Black Music Philosophy* (Lanham: The Scarecrow Press, 2010), 83.

Unlike myself, 2 Chainz, an Atlanta native and one-time Alabama State University student, was familiar with these traditions and understands their significance to the African-American populace, not just as entertainment, but as an aspect of Black identity. When he wanted to make a song speaking to the Southern Black experience, marking a heightened sense of awareness following George Floyd's death, the trope of the show-style marching band was what he chose to highlight as a form of Black cultural production. He demonstrated his understanding of the importance of this representation when describing the rationale behind the creation of his song "Money Maker" (2020).

The idea of the thought behind "Money Maker" and it being aligned with HBCU music or being a theme or halftime vibe was an idea I got, probably in high school attending schools that...had a heavy band culture. Like halftime, football games was a thing in high school. Then I got to [Alabama State, and] it's an even bigger culture...I heard this guy who had used some stuff that I just knew was just straight from a band. It was so nostalgic for me...I need somethin' that sound like halftime...I knew we was in a space that was all about being Black, representin' Black, dreaming Black. And that's what you hear.<sup>110</sup>

The "guy" Chainz was referencing is the producer Playa Pizzle (Elvin Presley). Being a former member of middle and high school bands taught by a Southern University of Baton Rouge Human Jukebox alumnus, Pizzle formed an instant rapport with 2 Chainz, which is illustrated in a dialogue about their creative process.

Pizzle: 2 Chainz already knew what he wanted. A historically Black college...just givin' that real band sound, that soulful sound.

2 Chainz: I was very specific. I want somethin' that sound like some band s\*\*t.

Pizzle: What I did was, I went to YouTube, and I found a clip of my favorite band, which is Southern University playin' one of my favorite songs, which is Guy, "Piece of My Love." I went from there with it...It was Southern University trombone section just pretty much runnin' it.

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<sup>110</sup> Isha Thorpe, "Watch 2 Chainz and Bryan Barber Talk 'Money Maker' and Honoring HBCUs| Revolt TV," *Revolt* [multimedia website], <https://www.revolt.tv/video/2020-10-24/105644/watch-2-chainz-and-bryan-barber-talk-money-maker-and-honoring-hbcus-revolt-summit/>.

2 Chainz: That’s the groove, that’s the swing, that’s the vibe. We have these rival teams. It’s [not only] the game, but the halftime show is competitive too. Battle of the bands is a real thing.<sup>111</sup>

In this chapter, I use Banfield as a framework to house data that traces and interrogates the manner Hip-Hop became integrated into show-style band traditions in the first place.

Although it did not occur overnight, or without some apprehension, Hip-Hop, like other forms of Black music emerged as a sonic identity in two locales that are connected through proximity or alumni influence: the yard and the neighborhood. To use these words requires that they be given the same definition and connotation as those within the bandworld, which is where I start. On the “yard” – the nickname of HBCU campuses – and the “neighborhood” or the mostly Black communities that surround these institutions, music is a common denominator that overlaps with the various activities that take place. These are places of Black joy and excellence, where music is welcomed and not silenced, and Hip-Hop and the sounds and imagery of show-style marching bands are a part of the Joel Leon conceived state of Afro-normalism.<sup>112</sup> This positioning of the band allows for measurement, documentation, and an explanation of the different ways sound in general moves throughout these spaces. I seek to explore the depth of the complete sonic environment, both musical and non-musical, that prompted bands to adopt the style.

Imparting my process of entering this African-American bandworld is a testament to the idea of culture and place when musicking, with these conditions affecting musical learning, doing, and being. Before entering this space, I had never heard of a campus being called a yard,

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<sup>111</sup> Beats by Dre, “2 Chainz ft. Lil Wayne “Money Maker” | Beat x Beat: Inside Out,” video, 03:41, October 19, 2020, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=62FkCmofey0>.

<sup>112</sup> “Afro-normalism (ahf-roe nōrm/a-leiřm): the art of capturing, depicting and celebrating Black people doing things that are considered mundane and ordinary to the general public. e.g., Black people fishing; Black people making tea; Black people reading comics; Black people living”; Joel Leon, “Sunday Manifest: Black People are More Than Excellence and Tragedy,” *Ebony* [online], April 25, 2021, <https://www.ebony.com/sunday-manifest-black-people-are-more-than-excellence-and-tragedy/>.

been accepted to play music at a church as an inexperienced drummer, played Grover Washington Jr.'s "Mister Magic" (1975), or helped recreate Hip-Hop beats voiced for the drum section and sousaphones. In order for me to connect with readers, I need to illustrate the vast differences between the environment I left and the one I entered. I achieve this by comparing and contrasting my own pre-collegiate band experiences with those of my two interlocutors, who were immersed in show-style band from an early age. Then, I increase the scope to include areas from Texas over to Florida, and up to Virginia, homing in on what scholar Matt Sakakeeny calls "the marching band belt," which comprises most, but not all the ecosystem.<sup>113</sup>

All the bands within that construct project a sound that represents the best of the historical and contemporary African-American South, with an ethos rooted in Southern Blackness, and an ability to absorb several types of music. If Hip-Hop acts as a conduit for style and aesthetic, and show-style bands act as influencers and sources of inspiration, then another source of sound, the DJ, has also taken on this function. This occurs even when the DJ and the band seek to dominate the same sonic real estate. It is this band/DJ dynamic that helped usher in the transformation of band music as a genre in and of itself, linked to all conventions of Black sounding. I draw upon the genre studies work of Fabian Holt and Jennifer C. Lena to support an argument of band music as Black genre, as it is considered in the Black bandworld. The insider Regina N. Bradley has theorized, "Hip-Hop manifests as a watermark of Southern Black identity in the post-civil rights American South," and as a teenage girl in Albany, Georgia, the formation of her sense of self started via a fascination with OutKast. This occurred through the lens of a

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<sup>113</sup> Matt Sakakeeny, "'We're Not just Shooting the Breeze': Marching Bands and Black Masculinity in New Orleans," *Southern Cultures* 27, no. 4 (Winter 2021): 52–53, <http://libproxy.sdsu.edu/login?url=https://www-proquest-com.libproxy.sdsu.edu/scholarly-journals/were-not-just-shooting-breeze/docview/2638291738/se-2>.

high school classmate and band member transcribing an OutKast song while writing an arrangement.<sup>114</sup>

The centrality of the marching ensemble, displayed by the instrumental arrangements they play or chants they yell, is felt in Hip-Hop culture. This positioning of the band and the DJ/sound system allows for measurement, documentation, and an explanation of how sound is created and received by these actors, in the places they occupy. In the concluding section of this chapter, I rely on ethnographic work – collecting data via soundwalks and observations – to be able to contextualize the DJ’s presence and role as an epicenter of music and energy that creates an atmosphere of inclusiveness to the culture, at tailgates, during football games, and on the campuses themselves.

### **KG and the Marching Band Belt**

My involvement with the San Diego underground Hip-Hop scene notwithstanding, I chose to leave my home city to attend JSU in search of a community that didn’t consciously or unconsciously undervalue Black aesthetics in music. The educational and professional infrastructure in San Diego represented a kind of musical anti-Blackness that does not completely deprive one of solid training, but does reinforce exactly what and who should be highly regarded musically. From music journalists ignoring events at Black-owned or Black-frequented venues, to the overemphasis placed on the values of Western Art Music or musical theater, concepts that Black musicians employed did not register.

The highly competitive world of the Drum Corps International (DCI) circuit, and the high school programs that pattern themselves after them, establishes a hierarchy of musical

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<sup>114</sup> Regina N. Bradley, “An Experiment in Teaching OutKast and the Hip Hop South,” *South: A Scholarly Journal* 50, no. 2 (2019): 105, [muse.jhu.edu/article/721625](https://muse.jhu.edu/article/721625); Regina N. Bradley, *Chronicling Stankonia: The Rise of the Hip-Hop South* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2021), 3.

knowledge, with Black music being almost non-existent, regardless of the jazz leanings of some of the groups.<sup>115</sup> The story I usually share that best illustrates my point has to do with me being left at a movie multiplex theater one evening in Pennsylvania when touring with a drum corps. There were nights off when we took group trips to these complexes, with all the young musicians insisting that their movie choice was the correct one. In a large ensemble full of instrumentalists, I was the only one who chose to see a movie about a musician – Spike Lee’s *Mo’Nasty* (1990). Besides the fact that I was too young to gain admission into an R-rated film, what was important was the impact this movie had on me. It was the first time I’d heard or saw Branford Marsalis and the drummer Jeff “Tain” Watts, who were highly visible and respected Black musicians. “Jazz Thing” (1990), a Hip-Hop song introducing both unfamiliar to prominent jazz musicians, was created by Gang Starr, and played during the ending credits.<sup>116</sup> This film strengthened the feeling I had after seeing JSU’s band earlier in the year. Black excellence in instrumental music was represented in a language that a young aspiring musician could understand, in a manner different from my teachers. After the movie ended, I realized I was alone and forgotten about at the Movieplex because the corps had left me there. The music and aesthetic I was moving towards didn’t matter as much to this community of musicians, whose knowledge of jazz included Stan Kenton, Chick Corea, Pat Metheny, and Gary Burton, but never Billy Strayhorn, McCoy Tyner, George Benson, or Bobby Hutchinson.

However, moving to a place with a larger Black population did not ensure a smooth transition during my first semester. Cultural dissonances that occurred when I went to Jackson

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<sup>115</sup> Information about Drum Corps International (DCI) can be found here, <https://www.dci.org/static/about-drum-corps-international>.

<sup>116</sup> The group Gang Starr consisted of the emcee Guru and the producer and DJ Premier. DJ Premier would become one of the most well-respected producers in Hip-Hop history, and work with Nas, KRS-One, The Notorious B.I.G., Rakim, Jay-Z, and more.

had to do with what I call “the dichotomy.” This label is in reference to the conception and lived experience of Blackness and Whiteness in the States due to our failure to address our legacy of White supremacist ideology and Eurocentric value systems. When this mantra is affiliated with music creation, pedagogy, and performance, it impacts musical outcomes. In many areas in the South, this thinking contributes to segregation so concretely that while I was an undergraduate, I rarely saw any White people on campus who weren’t working in some capacity.

When I entered the marching band at Jackson State, I was unfamiliar with the repertoire that others knew vicariously, marched in a completely different style, and couldn’t dance and move with my drum. Admittedly, my body language displayed the epitome of the militaristic stiffness that had been drilled into me since the fifth grade. Regardless of my love of electro-funk and pronounced pop-locking skills, when I harnessed my drum, there was no funk in me at all. My junior high school and high school directors were not, to my knowledge, enamored with the changes in marching band methodology in the late 1980s because of the influence of DCI on the marching arts. They were resistant to it. That didn’t mean that the accusation of going to a “corps-style” school wasn’t lobbed in my direction in Jackson. Not only that, but my newfound bandmates possessed a sense of history and comprehension of the lineage of their instructors, and the ramifications of that on their own study of music. The fact that they knew where their band directors went to school, what their primary instruments were, and which collegiate band informed their teaching approaches was fascinating to me, because in my own case, I didn’t have a clue.

All of these deficiencies led to a loud and swift condemnation by the upperclassmen drummers, who were now responsible for teaching me. “You went to a *White* school,” they said. “No,” I replied. After seeing a picture of my high school marching band, my bandmates in

Jackson were confused. The White, Black, Mexican, Filipino, and Pacific Islander, multi-cultural mix of students was something they had never seen before. As part of the dichotomy, their worldview was limited to a primarily Black–White construction, with musical aesthetics to match. Although I possessed a level of comfort in ethnically diverse situations that some of my bandmates did not, in truth, my high school music experience was bound to Whiteness in a way that did not match the student population. In retrospect, we didn't get close to anything funky.

For two of my interlocutors, Claire Milburn from Tulsa, Oklahoma, and Maurice LeFlore from Charleston, South Carolina, different experiences were at play. Both of them studied under bandmasters who were graduates of HBCU music education programs, and whose high school students fed into HBCU music departments. In comparison, the ecosystems they emerged from embraced expression and dance in Hip-Hop and R&B as part of the lingua franca of the band, including opportunities to write and arrange in that style. Claire and Maurice found that their music-making environments in high school reflected a completely different reality than my own.

Claire is from Tulsa, Oklahoma, and entered Booker T. Washington High School as a clarinetist, later becoming a multi-instrumentalist. Her alma mater is one of the few historically Black high schools in the city, which wasn't integrated until the 1970s, and was converted into a magnet program. She wanted to be at this school because even though she was a White teenager, this is the style of band she preferred. The program is under the direction of Harold Craig. Claire said that Craig is a percussionist, and although he is a graduate of the only HBCU in Oklahoma, Langston University, he patterned the band after the Grambling State University Tiger Band.<sup>117</sup> She informed me that her school was the only one that took White students to a Grambling High

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<sup>117</sup> The gravity of band director lineage cannot be understated. This establishes the level of and style of musicianship in the eyes of others, which is the reason people always ask about it. If a director, like Craig, is prominent but unknown to some, then we want to know more about him. Some of this pertains to how you were taught to arrange music, or the performance activities that many of these teachers partake in.

School Band Camp, and she experienced feeling like an outsider in a way she had not before. Despite that experience, she became comfortable in high school, and decided to become a band director while flourishing in the program. She states that her time in high school coincided with the deaths of Michael Jackson and Whitney Houston. Their music factored in heavily, as did the JSU fight song, “Get Ready” (1966), by the Temptations. Claire’s band director was twenty-eight, by her estimation, when she started, and his youthfulness is why she feels he embraced Hip-Hop so wholeheartedly. “He would let us arrange some and present stuff to the band. He would also write some songs.”<sup>118</sup>

Maurice, a Florida A&M graduate and professor of music at Albany State University, lived in an African-American community in Charleston. His middle school teacher, George Kenny, graduated from another HBCU, South Carolina State University, is a prominent regional jazz musician, and also taught Maurice’s high school band director, Linard McCloud.<sup>119</sup> The lineage is apparent because McCloud is also a product of the FAMU music department, and styled his group after the Marching 100 and the Bethune-Cookman University Marching Wildcats. Within this environment of performers/educators/arrangers, Maurice said that “marching band music-making and ideas from Black commercial music [were] not separate, [or] mutually exclusive.”<sup>120</sup> He recalled “Poison” (1990) by Bell Biv DeVoe being a crowd favorite.

Although students can join HBCU bands from anywhere, certain secondary schools perform in the vein of show-style bands, and prepare students for collegiate level groups. Claire and I are a living embodiment of the dichotomy, learning under a system that did not match our ethnic backgrounds. Our comparable band experiences on the collegiate level ushered me into

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<sup>118</sup> Claire Milburn, interview with author, August 2, 2020.

<sup>119</sup> A story about jazz in Charleston can be found here: [https://charlestonmag.com/features/jazz\\_it\\_up](https://charlestonmag.com/features/jazz_it_up).

<sup>120</sup> Maurice LeFlore, interview with author, March 8, 2021.

the Black bandworld she was already a part of. Maurice on the other hand was different from both of us. He was born with access to a musical universe in Charleston, which he took advantage of starting in elementary school, and which had stronger links than Tulsa and San Diego, because of the greater number of musicians and educators who were alumni of HBCU programs, and the deeper lineage. These are the series circumstances that allow for a Black bandworld to be constructed and an ecosystem to be formed.

Hearing the perspective of Christopher Herrero, the Director of Bands for Edna Karr High School, permits us to take a larger look at the Black bandworld, while also recognizing one of its nuclei: New Orleans, Louisiana. He mentioned a commonly held belief to a reporter from NPR that he, other residents in New Orleans, and followers of show-style bands everywhere affirm. “In other parts of the country, you know, people call band lovers band geeks. There's no such thing as a band geek in New Orleans. You know, we have bandheads...where band is life. It's a way for people to express themselves in ways that they can't in other avenues.”<sup>121</sup> His understanding of local culture, the idea of place, and his invocation of geographic meaning shatters the depiction of marching band participants as “nerds” and “geeks,” which is the manner they are presented in American mainstream media spaces. Herrero insists that “New Orleans is the mecca of marching bands because every city is envious of the great culture we have here.”<sup>122</sup> He continues by saying, “I don't think there's any other city in the country where literally everybody has a family member that has been a band member at some... point in their lives.”<sup>123</sup>

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<sup>121</sup> Keith O' Brien, “At a New Orleans High School, Marching Band is a Lifeline For Kids,” May 15, 2014, in *All Things Considered/Codeswitch* [NPR audio and text], 12:43, <https://www.npr.org/transcripts/312455384>.

<sup>122</sup> Mary Staes, “The Man Behind the Band: How One Director's Return to His High School Evolved into A Brand New Sound,” *Very Local* [website], July 15, 2019, <https://www.verylocal.com/the-man-behind-the-band-how-one-directors-return-to-his-high-school-evolved-into-a-brand-new-sound/14904/>.

<sup>123</sup> David Jones, “It's Not Work For Me, it's a Calling': Edna Karr Graduate-Turned-Band Director Kicks the Energy Up a Notch,” *Fox 8* [online news], February 25, 2022,

Band participation is a lifeline in musical activity, when marching ensembles are transformed into an activity for everyday existence, to a largely African-American population. LeBron Joseph, music teacher at New Orleans' The Roots of Music, admitted to Sakakeeny that this Black band culture is hard to translate for those not in the know, but eventually, the scholar himself became a convert to the "power, precision, and swagger" of show-style marching bands after hearing the St. Augustine High School Marching 100 for the first time, in 1997.<sup>124</sup>

This geographical grounding in the aforementioned marching band belt has ensured that band culture is intertwined with a Southern musical upbringing.<sup>125</sup> Herrero, and programs like his, comprise a network that links secondary schools to Black College campuses, and those schools to the vicinities near these institutions as well. Hip-Hop practitioners in the South are not exempt from the impact of this Black band culture. They live in these neighborhoods, hear these bands practicing, and attend these high schools. Some are even one-time band members themselves.

This display of Black music, Hip-Hop, and otherwise being linked to a Black existence through educational and cultural institutions isn't found in San Diego, and is barely found in California at all, because HBCUs aren't present. The idea, presence, meaning, and influence of the yard is something Black students at PWIs try to recreate, but as Banfield suggests, the "Black cultural phenomenology," or the "everydayness" of how Blackness permeates the campus, and the musical affect that accompanies it, is not replicable, as my findings show.<sup>126</sup> My time being initiated into the marching band belt was not only about joining the marching ensemble, but it

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<https://www.fox8live.com/2022/02/26/its-not-work-me-its-calling-edna-karr-graduate-turned-band-director-kicks-energy-up-notch/>.

<sup>124</sup> Sakakeeny, "'We're Not just Shooting the Breeze'," 49.

<sup>125</sup> Ibid.

<sup>126</sup> Banfield, *Cultural Codes*, 82.

was also about understanding the movement and presence of the HBCU campus. Everything starts with the yard.

## The Yard

HBCUs, the neighborhoods that surround them, and their graduates who teach in various locations all celebrate an atmosphere where music provides a meaning of familiarity and belonging, or as Douglas L. Allen argues, “a place of respite.”<sup>127</sup> It is Allen’s work in geography and African-American studies that supports the idea of the yard as a refuge, while also distinguishing itself as an academic environment. Campuses can be fittingly described as “center[s] where students can find the necessary resources to strengthen their academic skills.”<sup>128</sup> Still, instead of a pronounced staidness, the yard is a place that has “a certain feel, drive, and intensity, [to it],” according to FAMU Marching 100 alto saxophonist Rae’Kwon Bostic.<sup>129</sup> The integration of music into general campus life supplies a large portion of this vigor.

Ethnomusicologist Portia K. Maultsby contends that “music is integral to all aspects of [B]lack community life, and serves many functions when being performed in formal or informal settings.”<sup>130</sup> Student journalist Joshua Snell shared this exact sentiment when reporting for Morehouse College’s *Maroon Tiger*.<sup>131</sup> According to Snell, the music functions to “[draw] us in. [It] allows us to be ourselves and builds unity within the campus.”<sup>132</sup> In comparison, Florida

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<sup>127</sup> Douglas L. Allen, “Black Geographies of Respite: Relief, Recuperation, and Resonance at Florida A&M University,” *Antipode* 52, no. 6 (2020): 1564, <https://doi.org/10.1111/anti.12658>.

<sup>128</sup> Travis J. Albritton, “Educating Our Own: The Historical Legacy of HBCUs and Their Relevance for Educating a New Generation of Leaders,” 326.

<sup>129</sup> Rae’Kwon Bostic, interview with author, August 21, 2021.

<sup>130</sup> Portia K. Maultsby, “Africanisms in African-American Music,” in *Africanisms in American Culture*, ed. Joseph E. Holloway (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1990), 187.

<sup>131</sup> Joshua Snell, “Plug In: How Music Shapes Our HBCU Experience,” *The Maroon Tiger: Morehouse College*. October 30, 2014, <https://advance.lexis.com/api/document?collection=news&id=urn:contentItem:5DGN-7SN1-JBSN-30F9-00000-00&context=1516831>.

<sup>132</sup> *Ibid.*

State University student Nia Alexander proclaimed that she enjoyed attending her institution, but conceded that “I wish there was more of a HBCU feel to the campus.”<sup>133</sup> This “HBCU feel” she is referring to represents a certain rendering of music within a Black cultural phenomenology that Banfield maintains is typical in locales with a heavy African-American presence.<sup>134</sup> Here, it refers to an atmosphere where Hip-Hop is normalized and musical expression is part of the fabric that enhances the college experience.

It should be noted that Hip-Hop hasn’t or isn’t completely marginalized at PWIs. The importance of College Radio for Hip-Hop during the 1990s cannot be overstated. The inclusion of Hip-Hop at HBCU radio stations is documented, most notably with the four-hour Saturday morning *Kidz Jamm* program at Texas Southern’s KTSU, but even in that instance the program director needed convincing.<sup>135</sup> With some initial goading, the Stretch Armstrong and Bobbito Show was broadcast from Columbia University’s WKCR, and represented a style of programming that some PWIs welcomed.<sup>136</sup> In their format, listeners would be treated with unedited, free-flowing mixes and freestyle rhyme sessions, at a time when commercial Black radio was either unwelcoming or unwilling to present Hip-Hop in this unencumbered state.

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<sup>133</sup> Dennis Hudson, “Black students at FSU explain their college choice,” *The FAMUAN* [online], September 18, 2019, <http://www.thefamuanonline.com/2019/09/18/black-students-at-fsu-explain-their-college-choice/>. Studies and lawsuit verdicts have proven that many lawmakers have diverted and underfunded HBCUs for decades, in states where they are located. FAMU students are the latest to file a lawsuit. <https://www.cbsnews.com/news/famu-hbcu-underfunding-state-student-lawsuit/>.

<sup>134</sup> Banfield, *Cultural Codes*, 83.

<sup>135</sup> Texassouthern, “Kidz Jamm legend ‘Sir’ Pace celebrating with KTSU. He & some of the Kidz Jamm favorites are taking over KTSU. 10-2 Saturday!” TikTok [text and video post], June 24, 2022, [https://www.tiktok.com/@texassouthern/video/7113062524056243502?is\\_from\\_webapp=v1&item\\_id=7113062524056243502](https://www.tiktok.com/@texassouthern/video/7113062524056243502?is_from_webapp=v1&item_id=7113062524056243502); The Real K-Rino, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=izuaADYEFQc>; Sharifa Rhodes-Pitt, “The Kidz Are All Right,” *Houston Press* [online newspaper], January 31, 2002, <https://www.houstonpress.com/music/the-kidz-are-all-right-6559820>. JSU has started broadcasting Hip-Hop and R&B, as of August 2022, on a sister station, “The Sipp FM,” <https://thesipp.fm/>.

<sup>136</sup> Stretch Armstrong and Bobbito Garcia, *Stretch and Bobbito: Radio That Changed Lives*, directed by Bobbito Garcia, Saboteur Media, 2015, iTunes movie download; Richard S. Chang, “When A College Radio Station Ruled Hip-Hop,” <https://www.redbull.com/us-en/when-a-college-radio-station-ruled-hip-hop>.

Other manifestations of Hip-Hop at PWIs include concerts, Black Student Union sponsored events, Hip-Hop ensembles as accredited classes, and Hip-Hop Studies as an academic discipline being offered at the undergraduate and graduate levels.<sup>137</sup> The student-run North Carolina State University's Cypher University is a hub for events, with the initiative's Freedom Expression tunnel being the heart of the movement.<sup>138</sup> Several students at PWIs organize Hip-Hop dance groups as a club activity. Moreover, many historically African-American and non-African-American Greek organizations cooperate in acts of unity where Hip-Hop is foregrounded in the style of an HBCU campus.<sup>139</sup>

Yet, as John M. McCluskey found in his investigation into the sonic environment of PWI college football games, the act of mitigating and curtailing Hip-Hop highlights the differences between the taste of a coveted White fanbase versus the many Black players and recruits who labor on the field of play.<sup>140</sup> The stadium personnel responsible for the music even felt secure enough to label Black associated songs as “Ghetto-Row,” while excluding Hip-Hop by White artists from this classification.<sup>141</sup> The sometimes meaningful inclusion of Hip-Hop on PWI campuses does not alleviate tensions that can arrive at any time due to its presence. At PWIs,

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<sup>137</sup> Berklee School of Music offers multiple instrumental ensembles, and turntable ensembles. The University of Oregon School of Music and Dance also has a Hip-Hop ensemble. These are but two in a growing trend.

<sup>138</sup> Cypher University, “Details,” accessed December 27, 2022, Facebook, [https://www.facebook.com/cypheruniversity/about\\_details](https://www.facebook.com/cypheruniversity/about_details); Brian Howe, “From the Freestyle to the Protest, Cypher University Keeps the Code,” *Indy Week* [online version], posted June 17, 2020, <https://indyweek.com/music/features/cypher-university-feature/>.

<sup>139</sup> Joint stroll <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=O-bh45zIJMc>, or stroll swap, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mollCOZtQxQ>, activities.

<sup>140</sup> John Michael McCluskey, “‘This Is Ghetto Row’: Musical Segregation in American College Football,” *Journal of the Society for American Music* 14, no. 3 (2020): 345, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S175219632000022X>.

<sup>141</sup> *Ibid.*, 344. Many of the selections deemed “Ghetto” actually have positions of stature in mainstream popular music because of the acceptance of Hip-Hop on these terms. The distinction between songs like Travi\$ Scott’s “Upper Echelon” (2013) and House of Pain’s “Jump Around” (1992) is not the difference in age of the songs, but the race of the artists. Incidentally, during the course of the 2022 edition of the Jackson State versus Alcorn football game, a.k.a. the “Soul Bowl,” the playing of “Jump Around” by the Alcorn stadium DJ failed to move the crowd in the manner the song does at many PWI games, regardless of how loudly I sang the words.

Black sound generation is for the pleasure of those with their hand on the controls, ready to push the mute button whenever it suits them, similar to Brooklyn, D.C., and New Orleans gentrifiers.<sup>142</sup>

The integration of Hip-Hop into HBCU campus culture was found throughout my observations of the environment, or was relayed to me in interviews with current students or alumni from different institutions. When asked about the sounds they hear or the manner Hip-Hop is expressed on the yard, FAMU student, working DJ, and snare drummer, Terrance Bacon remarked that while walking around campus, “I hear someone rappin’ their favorite verse, or singing their favorite song, if it’s not the band, because you usually hear the band practicing.”<sup>143</sup> Alto saxophonist Jaleesa Smith relayed some of what she hears as emanating from cars. “I walk everywhere. I don’t have a car, so I hear... the speakers booming. There’s a lot of that. It’s mostly on the Hip-Hop/R&B scale.”<sup>144</sup> Rae’Kwon, a music industry major and daughter of musicians, informed me that there are beat makers within the band that she has collaborated with, and people throughout the campus are “always mixing this, mixing that.”<sup>145</sup> She insists that “there’s definitely a lot of Hip-Hop involved in that.”<sup>146</sup>

Hip-Hop is not without its critics on campuses. Dr. Thomas Earl Midgette was on the faculty at North Carolina Central University in the year 2000 when he expressed disdain for the

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<sup>142</sup> As a musician who has lived in areas where music is boisterous and spontaneous, I have experienced firsthand the ways gentrification has affected the sound culture of neighborhoods. This idea was sparked by being reminded of stories through the years about the cities mentioned in this introduction: Christina Zanfagna, Alex Werth, “Introduction: Soundscapes of American Gentrification,” *Journal of Popular Music Studies* 33, Issue 4 (2021): 64–77, <https://doi.org/10.1525/jpms.2021.33.4.64>.

<sup>143</sup> Terrance Bacon, interview with author, August 21, 2021.

<sup>144</sup> Jaleesa Smith, interview with author, August 21, 2021. It’s important to note that people, regardless of whether they’re students or not, come to the yard “to hang,” or to “be seen.” Just as in many other locations, a great way to attract attention is with your car system playing music people enjoy. This was also the case while I was a student at Jackson State in the 1990s.

<sup>145</sup> Bostic, interview with author.

<sup>146</sup> Ibid.

very behavior Terrance Bacon described occurring at FAMU. Dr. Midgette lamented seeing “students walking on campus reciting rap lyrics when they should be reciting something they’ll need to know on their next test.”<sup>147</sup> He felt that student investment into Hip-Hop culture was a distraction and unbecoming of college students. Students themselves cite the portrayal of women, lack of politically based content, and seemingly anti-intellectual posturing as problematic aspects of Hip-Hop being infused into a college campus lifestyle.

Nevertheless, events like FAMU’s “Set Friday,” SU’s “Pretty Wednesday,” or Albany State University’s “Wassup Wednesday’s” are social gatherings that feature Hip-Hop as part of the sonic environment. The constant presence of music, usually played by a DJ, is used to enliven the function. Depending on the location, these weekly events feature food, fellowship, vendors, or booths that address student needs. The Alcorn State University version of this type of occasion is called “Club Caf” or “Chicken Wednesday.” It was described by Sounds-O-Dynamite (SOD) alumnus, and now music educator Chesteron Frye as “somethin’ serious.”<sup>148</sup> I unearthed an Instagram post showing a cafeteria full of students swag surfing to the song (2009) by F.L.Y. (Fast Life Yungstaz), a 2017 student vlog entry showing dance battles and Greeks strolling, and a Facebook posting of DJ T-Money advertising an October 8, 2021, homecoming iteration of the event.<sup>149</sup> SOD alum Krystain Coleman provided details of her memories of Club Caf. “That was the day the whole campus would dress up in [their] best attire, and come to the

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<sup>147</sup> Pearl Stewart “Who’s Playin’ Whom?” *Black Issues in Higher Education* 21, no. 5 (2004): 26, <https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=a9h&AN=13087628&site=ehost-live>.

<sup>148</sup> Chesteron Frye, interview with author, February 8, 2022.

<sup>149</sup> Djmoneyent, Instagram posted video, April 21, 2021, <https://www.instagram.com/p/CN8IQ4qpice/>; Maes World, “They Turned The Cafe Into a Club! #College Vlog Ep.5,” *Maes World: Your Favorite College Vlogger* [YouTube Vlog], September 14, 2017, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=alKumazFeXY>; Alcorn State University, “Meet me at the Cafe! #THEGHOAT21,” Facebook, October 26, 2021, [https://m.facebook.com/AlcornStateU/photos/a.10150851681820720/10165770032285720/?\\_se\\_imp=00KIMSpuazm2cF0Sq](https://m.facebook.com/AlcornStateU/photos/a.10150851681820720/10165770032285720/?_se_imp=00KIMSpuazm2cF0Sq).

cafeteria, not to eat chicken, but to show off your outfits...to stroll if you're a Greek."<sup>150</sup>

Coleman added that aspiring professional or hobbyist rappers would also be allowed to perform in some instances. Frye's recollection was just as vivid. "From 11[am] till 1:30[pm] was 'Club Caf.' So you know, you can get your food or whatever, but in the middle section you got the DJ. The tables [are spread] out. All the Greeks strolling. All the regular people, they dancing...It's a club, in the [cafeteria]... It been goin' on since before I got to Alcorn. It's steady goin' on to this day."<sup>151</sup>

Frye is a member of Alpha Phi Alpha Fraternity, which is one of the nine African-American Greek fraternities and sororities he was referring to, that comprise the National Pan-Hellenic Council.<sup>152</sup> These organizations, also known as the Divine 9, are as central to HBCU campus life as the band. Along with the Greek-lettered, music service organizations, their presence dictates certain songs to be played that contribute to the "Black College Canon" due to the act of "party hopping," otherwise known as strolling.<sup>153</sup> These songs, as reflected in various TIDAL-assembled HBCU-themed playlists, hold purpose.<sup>154</sup> Some, like George Clinton's "Atomic Dog" (1982), or the Omega Psi Phi Fraternity unofficial theme song, are very specific. Others are more general, and exclusivity to Greeks alone is not as socially enforced. Thus, the universal appeal of these songs means that they are not just accepted, but are actually anticipated

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<sup>150</sup> Krystain Coleman, interview with author, January 27, 2022.

<sup>151</sup> Frye, interview with author.

<sup>152</sup> "About the NPHC," *National Pan-Hellenic Council* [official website], <https://www.nphcq.com/about/>.

<sup>153</sup> There isn't a single definition for "strolling" agreed upon in the research. It can be described as an African American-derived dance that builds interdependence, and represents unity with Greek organizations, usually performed in a moving line. Many non-Black Greek organizations have adopted strolling with some controversy, <https://www.southeastarrows.com/story/2917003.html>. Music Greek service organizations are not historically Black, however they operate in different ways on HBCU campuses than they do at most PWIs. At HBCUs, members of Kappa Kappa Psi, Tau Beta Sigma, and Phi Mu Alpha Sinfonia have been known to stroll and enter official step show competitions.

<sup>154</sup> HBCU Gameday Newswire, "HBCU Homecoming: TIDAL Drops New Playlist," *HBCU Gameday* [online media portal], October 12, 2021, <https://hbcugameday.com/2021/10/12/hbcu-homecoming-tidal-drops-new-playlists/>.

during events. Despite their age, songs such as “Wipe Me Down” Remix (2006) featuring Lil’ Boosie, Crime Mob’s “Knuck If You Buck” (2004), and Juvenile’s “Back That Azz (Thang) Up” (1998), are considered standard fare according to interlocutor testimony, the various assembled playlists available on streaming platforms, and my own observations during fieldwork.

Homecoming is a highly celebrated event at HBCUs, with music playing a vital role. It is a week that consists of Yard Fest, concerts, luncheons, fundraising initiatives, step shows, a football or basketball game, and a parade, which those in attendance compared to a family reunion. Douglas L. Allen, who is adamant that his work on race and geography be an example of research conducted on periods of Black joy rather than suffering or death, embedded himself within the FAMU community during their homecoming celebration. This permitted him to document and portray the event appropriately:

This Black celebration of an HBCU...is a socio-spatial practice that utilizes musical rhythm and dancing, place-making discourses, and material appropriation of space to assert claims of belonging and presence within the city. FAMU’s homecoming is produced from and is productive of Black senses of place; it produces visceral, embodied experiences of community and projects a particular vision of FAMU and Tallahassee.<sup>155</sup>

Hip-Hop practitioners travel to place themselves in this atmosphere of Black joy before, during, and after homecoming week. They seek to connect with the HBCU community to show support of the mission of the institution, but to also solicit sponsorship from a piece of their core audience. Richard Anderson, staff writer for the *FAMUAN* argued that “HBCUs play a major role in the culture of both R&B and [Hip-Hop]” before detailing an unplanned, nonchalant visit to the campus dorm area by NBA YoungBoy an hour before the release of his *AI YoungBoy 2*

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<sup>155</sup> Douglass L. Allen, “Asserting a Black Vision of Race and Place: Florida A&M University’s Homecoming as an Affirmative, Transgressive Claim of Place,” *Geoforum* 111 (2020): 62, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.geoforum.2020.03.007>.

(2019) mixtape.<sup>156</sup> Homecoming week, however, is when alumni and supporters converge onto the university and live concerts are scheduled. Anderson mentioned performances by Lil Baby and DaBaby during FAMU's 2019 activities. Lil Uzi Vert made a point of stringing together a series of concerts during the 2016 homecoming season. While he was not at FAMU, evidence shows him at Hampton, Howard, Bowie State, Morgan State, and Lincoln University, where he thanked students for the opportunity to perform, and for "believing in me."<sup>157</sup>

To many African Americans who may not have attended an HBCU, Howard University's (HU) homecoming festivities loom large, with Hip-Hop playing a key role in that designation. Nicknamed "The Mecca," the university's centralized location, in our nation's capital, between the Southern region and the tri-state area, places the institution in a prime position for receiving a cross section of Black visitation. As the university of choice for singer-songwriters Donny Hathaway and Roberta Flack, pianist and composer Geri Allen, impresario Sean "P. Diddy/Puff Daddy" Combs, audio engineer and producer Young Guru (Gimel Keaton), and home to the nationally renowned vocal jazz ensemble Afro-Blue, HU is brimming with musical activity. Longtime Director of Bands Kelvin Washington, now retired, exclaimed that Howard's homecoming is "completely off the chain."<sup>158</sup>

A 2018 accounting of events included reports on the presence of Top Dog Entertainments' Jay Rock. His performance at the annual step show, and joining the HU Showtime Marching Band for a halftime rendition of his song "Win" (2018), was deemed memorable, and the gravity of being able to perform at HU during their homecoming festivities

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<sup>156</sup> Richard Anderson, "FAMU, Other HBCUs, Influence Hip-Hop," *The FAMUAN* [online newspaper], October 16, 2019, <http://www.thefamuanonline.com/2019/10/16/famu-other-hbcus-influence-hip-hop/>.

<sup>157</sup> Maliik Obee, "The Hip-Hop Artist Playing at an HBCU Near You," *Afro-American*, Oct, 2016, 5 Star edition, <https://www.proquest.com/newspapers/hip-hop-artist-playing-at-hbcu-near-you/docview/1840775581/se-2?accountid=14524>.

<sup>158</sup> Kelvin Washington, interview with author, April 6, 2023.

was not lost on the California emcee. Both he and Washington provide reflections. Jay Rock felt, “For me to be a part of Howard Homecoming, this is one of the biggest things to come around. This is my first time ever being here. Man, it just means a lot for them to even think of me. I felt the vibe and I felt the passion...when [the band and I] was out there rehearsing. They really serious, and that gives me motivation and inspiration...to go extra harder for ‘em. Anytime I get a call to help my brothers and sisters, I’m here.”<sup>159</sup> Washington was thinking much more technically, and not as much about cultural significance when explaining the reasons behind hiring a company to bring in external sound gear and his decision to mic the band members. His goal was to give the show a live, Hip-Hop performance feel, without the band needing to overblow to be heard.<sup>160</sup> This also permitted Jay Rock to insert himself on the field without the need for extended rehearsal time.

From October 15–22, 2022, JSU held its homecoming week. It was branded “It’s A Different World,” in homage to the television show set on the fictional HBCU campus of Hillman College. The Hip-Hop concert targeting students featured Moneybagg Yo, while alumni were treated to a party with Memphis stalwarts 8Ball & MJG.<sup>161</sup> Music filled the air during the Yard Fest on October 21st. The requisite DJs played songs from the canon with Greeks strolling at times, and alumni doing the electric slide in other areas. Vendors and food trucks were part of the scene. Homecoming requires that the Sonic Boom of the South and Prancing J-Settes (JSU’s majorette dance team) make an appearance, which elicited yells and shouts of approval.

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<sup>159</sup> Andscape, “TDE’s Jay Rock at Howard Homecoming,” video, 01:56, Facebook, November 1, 2018, <https://www.facebook.com/theundefeatedsite/videos/tdes-jay-rock-at-howard-homecoming/308243529999699/>.

<sup>160</sup> Washington, interview with author.

<sup>161</sup> “JSU’s ‘Different World’ Homecoming to Feature Moneybagg Yo,” <https://www.visitjackson.com/media/press-releases/jsu-homecoming-22/>; We Came To Play, “Thee Day Party Recap 2022!! Thank you to all who attended to make this event EPI. See y’all in 2023 #Share #Tag,” Facebook, November 6, 2022, <https://www.facebook.com/watch/?v=490208346399581>.

Although homecoming is most known to the layperson, springtime occasions, like SpringFest/TigerFest at Grambling State University (GSU) or Alcorn's music and comedy festival, aptly named Brave Fest, also host national and local Hip-Hop practitioners. Chesteron Frye recalled seeing Kevin Gates and Big Sean while an undergraduate. When sharing my own experience of seeing the band Mint Condition at GSU, we mutually realized the significance of the access we had to artists who might not have crossed over into mainstream audiences, but were successful to young, Black people. There is often an inculturation, or introduction to artists who have an HBCU following.

Chesteron Frye: Like when Kevin Gates came, like Lil' Webbie and stuff, some of them songs. We had already just heard it on the radio, like the Baton Rouge radio station. Some of the kids that was new to Alcorn, they had never heard of the artists, or they had never heard of these songs before...It was hearing, like the local people. Well, we would call them local, but they was big to us, but we would call them local.

Kevin Green: But they [were] still part of the fabric.

Frye: Right.<sup>162</sup>

The program being Hip-Hop heavy was not deemed out of place, which is another indicator of the regularity of the culture on the yard.

Walking, learning, and musicking on the yard contributes to a state of being that celebrates sound in connection to all of these activities. As Banfield writes, music allows for the shaping of a modern world where music resides, not as an optional feature, but a mandatory one.<sup>163</sup> However this residency does not exist on the yard alone, but also in the many Black neighborhoods where these campuses were built. The yard blends into the vicinity with activity

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<sup>162</sup> Frye, interview with author.

<sup>163</sup> William C. Banfield, *Representing Black Music Culture: Then, Now, and When Again* (Lanham: The Scarecrow Press, 2011), xvi.

and with an aesthetic designed to be inclusive of the people near the campus, regardless of whether they're students or not.

### **The Yard–Neighborhood Connection**

In a general sense, the best way to explain the substance of this connection is with two individuals who took time to reminisce about a childhood spent in cities with large HBCU imprints. Cultural critic, ESPN contributor, and HBO talk show host Bomani Jones is the son of Prairie View A&M professors, and is able to share the essence of HBCU culture through years of visiting the campus, and living in the vicinity. During a recorded conversation with former Louisiana State and NFL player Marcus Spears, the Baton Rouge native and graduate of Southern University Lab School revealed what his relationship was to the institution, in comparison to LSU. He and Jones establish the lived reality of the yard–neighborhood connection, while telling listeners about being raised in this environment:<sup>164</sup>

Marcus Spears: Bo, the thing is, man, is that when you bring up Baton Rouge, all I relate Baton Rouge is to Southern University. My mom went to Southern. My dad went to Southern. I was born and raised on an HBCU campus, so I got the best of both worlds...I went to high school at Southern University Lab School...I was on the yard. I knew what “on the yard” was before the movie came out, “Stomp the Yard.” It’s a culture ingrained in me.

Bomani Jones: When you grow up around an HBCU as a kid, you always there. It’s not like it’s over there and it’s this thing that you heard about. They got programs to keep us out of trouble... You get that taste of it... When you grow up around [Prairie View], around Southern, around those schools that really dominate the town that they in, everybody goes there, even if you don’t go there.

Spears: When I think about my life...my best times was on Southern University campus...My sister went to [Louisiana State University] on a basketball scholarship. That was my first initiation to LSU. Bo, I lived five minutes away from LSU campus, and I didn’t go on that campus till I was fifteen, bro...I felt I was so comfortable in [HBCU] culture. And everything that I had known and grew up with, was about that. I went to Southern University games with my

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<sup>164</sup> Some HBCUs have lab schools connected to the university for the purpose of training their education majors. Spears played college football for Louisiana State University, not Southern.

grandmother....When I got drafted, bro, I went and got me a Mercedes. The first place I wanted to go, was drive on Southern campus.<sup>165</sup>

If Portia K. Maulsby has already established the centrality of music in the lives of African Americans, then the work of Allen and McCreary reinforces the idea of sound helping to maintain Blackness in the city setting. Allen singularly, or in partnership with McCreary, chronicled representations of Blackness by students and urban residents, through the making of Black-affirming spaces in Tallahassee, Florida. They speak of people employing an assertiveness in place-making when proposing that “soundscapes serving to expand the enunciability of Blackness offer a mode for Black communities to claim urban belonging.”<sup>166</sup> The yard and the neighborhood do not always coexist peacefully, but they are not separate entities. They are tied together economically, culturally, and by way of sound, through the consumption and expression of the marching band. The Black cultural production that occurs because of the prominence of the ensemble engulfs the entire vicinity.

A comparative example of this dynamic is found in the research of Kimberly Bohannon. She observed members of two PWI ensembles – the Northwestern University Wildcat Marching Band and the University of Oregon Marching Band. When emphasizing that Northwestern University is located in the Chicago suburb of Evanston, Illinois, and Oregon in the college town of Eugene, she concluded that universities with large marching groups are generally not located in large urban centers.<sup>167</sup> She briefly acknowledges HBCUs in her thesis but assumes too much

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<sup>165</sup> Bomani Jones and Marcus Spears, “Marcus Spears on Brady Looking His Age and the Magnificence of Mahomes,” January 18, 2023, in *The Right Time with Bomani Jones*, produced by Gabe Basayne, podcast, MP3 audio, 01:00:50, [https://www.espn.com/radio/play/\\_/id/35471345](https://www.espn.com/radio/play/_/id/35471345).

<sup>166</sup> Douglas L. Allen and Tyler McCreary, “Performing Black Life: The FAMU Marching 100 and the Black Aesthetic Politics of Disruption, Presence and Affirmation,” *Cultural Geographies* 28, no. 1 (January 2021): 44, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1474474020931536>.

<sup>167</sup> Kimberly Marshall Bohannon, “Marching Band As Culture: Aesthetics, Identity, and Representation” (master’s thesis, University of Oregon, 2004), 4.

similarity between them and PWIs when expounding upon the campus-to-city relationship. It is nowhere near the same. The FAMU Marching 100, JSU Sonic Boom of the South, and the Human Jukebox of Southern University are all located in the capital cities of those respective states, which by definition are urban centers, but they are also associated with sections of the city that were, and sometimes continue to be, segregated. The discrimination that plagues African Americans is an experience that all people in these locales must endure.

Bohannon and I both underestimated the gravity of the kinship between HBCU bands and Black Southerners, because the bond forged between them was under the staunch rules and conditions of segregation. Hip-Hop journalist and contributor Charlie Braxton enlightened me to these facts when recalling childhood memories of fellowshipping with Alcorn State and Jackson State band members after they finished performing during the Christmas Parade in McComb, Mississippi. The students had to depend on community members in ways I did not foresee. His recollections did not involve hearing the band play:

Charlie Braxton: I remember distinctly coming in contact with Alcorn..it may have been Jackson State's band. This was in the 60s. I was a kid. This was back during segregation. There was a drive-in called *Lawson's Drive-Inn* that was across the highway from us. It was a White only drive-in, but it would let you come to the back, and you would have to wait your turn, after they serve all the White people....but they wouldn't let you use the bathroom. So a lot of the band kids came over across the highway and they would knock on doors. They knocked on our door...So I saw band members as early as maybe seven or eight.<sup>168</sup>

I interject because these types of interactions had never entered my mind. I see that, like many, I only understand segregation theoretically, not in the everyday.

Kevin Green: I'm thinking, [you hear the band] just playing. But no. They're coming into your house?

Braxton: They're coming into our house. I remember it happening at least two or three times when I was a kid. It wouldn't be just one or two. It would be like

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<sup>168</sup> Charlie Braxton, interview with author, January 29, 2023.

ten... They'd knock on your door and say, "Can we use your bathroom?" And they'd sit in the living room, sit on the porch, and wait their turn...Lawson would not let them eat there. They had to eat on the bus...It was like a party of kids at the house.<sup>169</sup>

It was crucial for band members to stay within parameters that if crossed, mistakenly or on purpose, could result in them getting killed. Some might think that alluding to death is too strong, but I found a document that illustrates this state of affairs. An incident was recorded by the civil rights umbrella coalition Council of Federated Organizations (COFO). Organizers Malcolm Campbell and Douglas Jenkins were "driven off from Lawson's Drive-Inn on Hwy 24 and threatened by the gun-wielding proprietor after ordering two ice cream cones," on October 26th, 1964.<sup>170</sup> The owner did not want those he saw as "troublemakers" at his establishment. These bands mean something different to an African-American populace living under segregation because the connection was born out of necessity, not choice.

Musically speaking, based on the suburban location of the institutional ensembles she has researched, Bohannon insists that "although marching bands do sometimes disrupt the local neighborhood, this disruption is not positional by design...Disruptions are sometimes accidental.... [They] are resolved through the bureaucratic system of the university, and are not often repeated."<sup>171</sup> Statements given by JSU Assistant Band Director Brandon Jenkins directly contradict Bohannon's depiction of bands being rackety in an urban setting causing major problems. Although there were noise complaints levied against the 2022 edition of the Magnolia

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<sup>169</sup> Ibid.

<sup>170</sup> In 1961, the Council of Federated Organizations (COFO) was established as an umbrella organization to unify and meet the needs of an increasing presence of civil rights organizations in Mississippi, including the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC), the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE), the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC), the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), and a host of local civil rights organizations. <https://www.jsu.edu/cofo/comprehensive-overview-of-the-fannie-lou-hamer-institute-cofo/>; <https://www.crmvet.org/info/mccomb1964.pdf>.

<sup>171</sup> Ibid.

All-Stars summer band during rehearsals I witnessed in Jackson, the regularly scheduled disruption by university bands when the yard–neighborhood connection is in play is met not with tolerance but, rather, with anticipation by onlookers to see and hear the rehearsal process.

As a band member, and even now as a band director... When the band is crankin' at 11, 12 o'clock [at night], you have people literally sittin' on their porch with a glass [or mason jar] of Kool-Aid. The band is out there....They love it...People are on their porch because the HBCUs are generally in an area that represents their community... You won't see too many HBCUs in a predominantly White area.<sup>172</sup>

For another example, I return to Allen and McCreary's scholarship. They map the integration of the FAMU Marching 100 into the lives of citizens with the deliberate routing of the homecoming parade through their neighborhoods. This is seen as an act of solidarity with residents of Frenchtown and Southside Tallahassee, who consider FAMU's homecoming activities to be "a community affair."<sup>173</sup> Outside of the residents in the Florida State University adjoining Frenchtown neighborhood, individuals and institutions located across the literal railroad tracks, see things differently. With FAMU on one side, the visible and physical barrier acts as a racial and socioeconomic dividing line in the city, due to the State Capitol – and all the power it houses – being situated on the Florida State University side of tracks. Some students, associates, or supporters of Florida State's presence characterize FAMU as "less than," see their homecoming activities as cumbersome, and engage in "White flight," during the festivities.<sup>174</sup> The 2011 death of a Marching 100 drum major, Robert Champion Jr., caused by injuries

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<sup>172</sup> William F. Montgomery and Hillary Lester, "Episode 009 - Brandon Jenkins and the Sonic Boom!" November 16, 2020, in *Sounds of the World*, podcast, MP3 audio, 01:15:00, <https://redcircle.com/shows/sounds-of-the-world/ep/d8bed0ac-4795-4d60-90b8-b0c12f19584c>. The last part of that statement may need to be amended due to the gentrification that has occurred, or is ongoing, near Howard University in Washington D.C., and the institutions that comprise the Atlanta University Center, in West Atlanta, Georgia.

<sup>173</sup> Allen and McCreary, 49.

<sup>174</sup> *Ibid.*, 47.

sustained during illegal hazing rituals, was used as an excuse to cast dispersions on the entire university.<sup>175</sup> The positive connection that the Marching 100 continues to maintain with Black Tallahassee is not voiced in the rhetoric of their city counterparts. Along with gentrification, the hazing incident hastened a reduction in the imprint FAMU that retains in the city.<sup>176</sup>

Testimony given by HBCU band alumni who lived in close proximity to high school and collegiate show-style ensembles in their formative years is plentiful, powerful, and provides evidence of the yard–neighborhood dynamic from those exposed to the culture at a youthful age. Respondents meticulously detail the draw they felt to these institutions established by the ensemble and its staff, which prompted forms of musical play. “Musical play” is often visualized in mainstream culture when seeing children imitate an artist by singing along with recordings while holding a pretend-microphone hairbrush in front of a mirror. For Desmond L. Kemp, a North Carolina A&T (NCAT) Blue and Gold Marching Machine alum, his musical play was stimulated by his attraction to show-style bands via his aunt, who was both a drum major at Hoke County High School and later a band member at Fayetteville State University. “After each game I found enjoyment practicing [drum major] moves in the front yard,” Kemp wrote proudly.<sup>177</sup> “I had toy instruments, flags, batons, and my hat. I acted out the role of every band unit for hours.<sup>178</sup> My own observation of this kind of behavior occurred in 1992, my first year marching in the Sonic Boom. It was fascinating to see children dressed in custom-designed uniforms with

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<sup>175</sup> Douglas L. Allen, *Geoforum*, 63; Shannon Green, “8 Years After Robert Champion Jr.’s Death, We’re Still Not Changing Mindset’s About Hazing| Commentary,” *Orlando Sentinel* [online], November 23, 2019, <https://www.orlandosentinel.com/opinion/columnists/os-op-famu-hazing-robert-champion-20191123-5ff575tz6rbjcwffzin5cfia-story.html>.

<sup>176</sup> Allen and McCreary, 48.

<sup>177</sup> Desmond L. Kemp, “Marching to Preserve Our History: One Cadence at a Time,” in *The HBCU Experience: The HBCU Band Alumni Edition*, ed./author Christy A. Walker and Ashly Little (Self Published: The HBCU Experience, 2022), 35.

<sup>178</sup> *Ibid.*

handmade or store-bought toy instruments or drum major maces. Some of them would bring real drum sticks to our performances in order to watch and imitate the sounds and movements of the drum section.

Alcorn alumni Chesteron Frye and Krystain Coleman both have a longstanding relationship with the university and the Sounds-O-Dynamite. “I used to see the band when I was in elementary school,” Coleman stated.<sup>179</sup> “They used to come to our...homecoming parades. Everyone loves Alcorn band so much. Anything Alcorn related they are going to just love. I enjoyed seeing that as a kid.”<sup>180</sup> The status of Frye’s mother being a former clarinet section leader had granted him access to one-time SOD Director Sammy Griffin since he was six. He was allowed to sit by the band during games, and eventually to observe and practice with them when in eleventh grade.

The dynamic between the yard and the neighborhood is also affected by HBCU-trained band directors abiding by the music department tradition of maintaining a hybrid practice between performing, arranging, and teaching, regardless of position level. Not all HBCU music departments encourage this status, but I and other graduates from selected programs are modeling our career paths after the educators who were around us. They often come from a previous or current gigging lifestyle in commercial, vernacular, or sacred music, in addition to being band directors. JSU-trained educators like Cedric Eubanks at Blackburn Laboratory Middle School, Stephanie Sanders at Norfolk State University, and Dr. Ollie Liddell at Central High School in Memphis are all a reflection of former Cab Calloway arranger and JSU’s first full-time band director, “Prof.” William W. Davis. They all understand that being able to engage

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<sup>179</sup> Coleman, interview with author.

<sup>180</sup> Ibid.

and entertain audiences augments their teaching, because their ears and eyes are fully aware of what repertoire, trends, and nuances are preferred musically in the territory where they work. These band directors act as an extension of the yard into the community after graduating, even when taking positions in places outside of the Southern region.

When Hip-Hop became popular with Black youth, music educators began to foster an additional aspect of the connection. Former snare drummer and drum major Charles “Chuck” Nicoles used to attend rehearsals for the Marching Wolverine Band of Morris Brown College as a boy. Originally from West Atlanta, his familiarity with Director of Bands Eddie Ellis, a father-like figure, prompted him to reject scholarship offers from other universities farther away from home. Musically, he is a product of the band/Hip-Hop symbiosis, due to his proximity to both, which led to his hyper-awareness of the nexus between the yard, the neighborhood, the city in its entirety, and the marching ensemble. In an interview with Regina N. Bradley and Christina Lee, Nicoles related a sharp vision of how the Wolverine Band was culturally situated within the growing domination of Atlanta Hip-Hop. Bradley, in turn, felt there was a parallel between a period of strength in the Morris Brown band of the late 90s and early 2000s, and the rise of Atlanta Hip-Hop in the commercial music industry. Nicoles offered his ideas:

With us being a band that hailed from the inner city of Atlanta we wouldn't go anywhere without playing something that was true ATL. Whether that was Lil' Jon Crunk music, Killer Mike, Outkast obviously...It was cool to get to everyone else, but we wanted you to know that we was from Atlanta, and you was gonna get hit with this Atlanta sound. Likewise, I don't think there's an artist out of Atlanta that hasn't either referenced us, used us in a video, put us on a soundtrack of some sort...So, we have been a huge part of the Hip-Hop culture from that standpoint. A lot of rappers out of Atlanta make marching band references. Because that's just such an integral part about how band fits into the sound of Hip-Hop.<sup>181</sup>

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<sup>181</sup> Regina N. Bradley and Christina Lee, S1 Ep. 13, “Our Band Is Better Than Your Band,” August 11, 2019, in *Bottom of The Map*, produced by Floyd Hall, podcast, MP3 audio, 27:35, <https://podcasts.apple.com/us/podcast/our-band-is-better-than-your-band/id1462206435?i=1000446682192>.

This synchronous existence is not limited to collegiate band students. It resonates with Hip-Hop practitioners like Pizzle and Mississippi rapper/producer Big K.R.I.T. as well. Both participated in show-style bands until the end of high school, but applied aspects of that experience to their Hip-Hop production. Pizzle has explained how the mentorship he received in middle and high school band, and the sound of the SU Human Jukebox, inspired him in his musical endeavors. He was deliberate in acknowledging one of his band directors in the process:

As a musician from Baton Rouge, [Louisiana], it feels great to put the Jukebox out there like that, because from 6th grade until I graduated I was in the marching band. Every single band director I ever had was a former SU band member and I really learned how music is supposed to sound (shoutout Derrick Walker). But most importantly for me, hopefully people will notice the different styles of production coming from my city.<sup>182</sup>

K.R.I.T.'s marching band experience in Meridian, Mississippi, was reflective of show-style bands in the state. Although he is associated with the JSU Sonic Boom because of a memorable performance with them at the 2015 Honda Battle of the Bands (BOTB), he has not said on record which band influenced his middle school and high school band experience. It is the sound of his horn and his background in a show-style marching ensemble that has guided his sound choices and use of live instrumentation when producing beats for his Hip-Hop songs. "I was in the marching band ... 50-yard line, man," he said about performing at football games in Meridian.<sup>183</sup> "The reason my basslines and my music is so big is because I played the tuba. In my mind, it was like the bassline of the band, so you could hear it rumbling all the time."<sup>184</sup>

Although neither K.R.I.T. nor Presley participated in a collegiate band, their time spent with

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<sup>182</sup> Chris Mench, "How 2 Chainz and Lil' Wayne's 'Money Maker' Pays Tribute to Baton Rouge and HBCU Marching Band Culture," *Genius* [website], August 7, 2020, <https://genius.com/a/2-chainz-lil-wayne-s-money-maker-samples-southern-university-s-human-jukebox-marching-band>.

<sup>183</sup> Dave Cantor, "Rapper Big K.R.I.T. Offers a Tale from the South," *The Daily Progress* [online], October 21, 2015, [https://dailyprogress.com/entertainment/rapper-big-k-r-i-t-offers-a-tale-from-the-south/article\\_df3e32b0-7809-11e5-96d3-cbc45fba3030.html](https://dailyprogress.com/entertainment/rapper-big-k-r-i-t-offers-a-tale-from-the-south/article_df3e32b0-7809-11e5-96d3-cbc45fba3030.html).

<sup>184</sup> *Ibid.*

music educators establishes their connection to these ensembles and the derivative campus culture they symbolize.

Terms and ideas that symbolize Black-affirming spaces are not exclusive to on- or off-campus events, but as Allen reports they are fluid between the yard and the neighborhood, which has allowed a unique musical culture to be created. His work resonates with my own experience as an undergraduate and presently as an observer of the Black bandworld and HBCU lifestyle. This scholarship and data have led me to theorize the reasons behind the gradual absorption of Hip-Hop into show-style band presentation. If band music itself is a genre to individuals within this ecosystem, then any style of music is open for reinterpretation from the ensemble, without preconceived notions of what is or isn't appropriate.

### **Band Music As Black Genre**

Marching band music is no longer in the popular sphere, as it once was. Music that ensembles make is heard outside of music industry influence, and is not beholden to genre distinctions. There isn't a reliance on radio, promotional money, taste-makers, or any other barriers that artists have had to contend with in order to get their music heard on a large scale. Show-style bands play mostly covers for the delight of listeners, but what is noticeable and can be surprising to the uninitiated is when actors within the ecosystem come to prefer the marching band versions of songs over the originals. It is an aesthetic that adheres to the "vernacular contemporary," as Banfield observes, or rather the natural order in the Black bandworld.<sup>185</sup> It is a reality that has enabled band music to transform into Black genre.

There is a prescribed enculturation into the yard-neighborhood dynamic that allows one to contemplate the standing of the marching band and the music they play for those within the

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<sup>185</sup> Banfield, *Cultural Codes*, 84.

ecosystem. Bomani Jones' prominence came from sports media, but even within the confines of the company, he is still able to contextualize the intersections of sports, music, and Black culture, and has injected the ethos held by bandheads into media spaces where it had not existed before. His ability to articulate Black college culture doesn't just come from being the son of PVAMU professors; he is also a graduate of Clark Atlanta University. He depicts band members as cool, as opposed to nerds and geeks, which is in accord with the atmosphere described by New Orleans music educator Christopher Herrero. The difference in perception held within Sakakeeny's coined Black "marching band belt" is a phenomenon of what Jones describes as "two Americas."<sup>186</sup> He has called band members "the real stars," and has worn a T-shirt during his podcast requesting football officials to "Let 'Em Play 'Neck.'" He has classified the Cameo funk tune "Talking Out The Side of Your Neck" (1984) as a HBCU band standard, as all aficionados do.

Dr. Regina N. Bradley is on record associating the Cameo standard not with the funk band, but with marching ensembles. Jones and his producer Shannon Penn bolstered Bradley's claim when playing the arrangement performed by Clark Atlanta University's Mighty Marching Panthers during their radio broadcast.<sup>187</sup> The cohesion and reception of this tune by fans has tied it to its own nameless genre. This sense of ownership is so strong to bandheads that they balk when songs like "Neck" cross over into PWI band repertoire, as this tune is now associated with the Louisiana State University Golden Tiger Band in mainstream culture.<sup>188</sup> As stated earlier, the

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<sup>186</sup> Ryan E. Smith, "Band Geeks? Not Anymore Thanks to Hip-Hop and Some High-Pro," *The Blade*, August 27, 2006.

<sup>187</sup> Bradley and Lee, S1 Ep. 13, "Our Band Is Better Than Your Band,"; Bomani Jones and Shannon Penn, September 7, 2016, in *The Right Time With Bomani Jones*, produced by Shannon Penn, podcast, MP3 audio download, 46:53.

<sup>188</sup> The nuance needed to understand this situation requires historical and present knowledge of band culture and Baton Rouge. It has to do with the phenomenon of Black erasure, as LSU fans claimed "Neck" as their own because the first time they had heard it was when it was played by the LSU Tiger Band. The shirt Bomani Jones wore is

depiction of marching bands as associated with Whiteness is contested when the Jones rendering links the activity and the music they make to Black popular culture.

In an interview with Texas Southern Assistant Band Director and Chief Arranger, Trenton Hunter, he proclaimed, without prompting, that HBCU band music is its own genre. His estimation was not based on repertoire. He associates it with the sonic texture of the arrangements and the playing style of the bands becoming more acceptable outside of the Black bandworld. We both agreed that the power and extreme range that bands utilize derives from big band and New Orleans Brass Band traditions that were once shunned, but are now accepted by “schooled” musicians. Hunter feels that the shifting taste that allowed jazz and Hip-Hop to infiltrate academia and high cultural institutions will eventually cause HBCU band music to be seriously considered as a genre.<sup>189</sup>

Band music as Black genre would seem inconceivable to Negus and Frith, whose frame of reference for music classification is attached to the economic ambitions of music industry operatives. Band music as a Black genre would be difficult for them to fathom as they were not raised within the Black bandworld, as was Jones. Although publishing and selling arrangements used to be a primary revenue stream in popular music, as it is presently in the marching arts, this aspect of the music business does not determine genre in the manner of the record object, the amount of terrestrial or satellite radio spins, or streaming service playlist additions. In fact, show-

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actually in reference to the LSU band not being allowed to play the tune because of the inappropriate lyrics the students attached to the song while football games were being broadcast on television. LSU fans have been guilty of ignoring the presence and impact of Southern University in Baton Rouge, who had included “Neck” in their repertoire years before them. Most aficionados of HBCU bands who classify LSU’s actions as cultural appropriation either fail to acknowledge the presence of Dr. Kelvin Jones, an African-American graduate of Jackson State University, on their band staff, or they accuse him of being a sellout in social media comments. Recognizing current trends, PWIs are beginning to hire HBCU graduates in order to incorporate show-style ideas into their presentation, which will be addressed in Chapter 2. In 2022 LSU and SU played a football game in which the bands of both schools performed together during halftime. <https://www.wbrz.com/news/let-the-band-play-neck-southern-band-director-teases-plans-for-game-day-at-lsu/>.

<sup>189</sup> Trenton Hunter, interview with author, September 12, 2021.

style stock arrangements have only recently been commissioned, partially due to the *DRUMLine Live* stage show, with mainly bands outside of the Black community wanting to play them.<sup>190</sup>

Even though Frith gives a nod to critics and DJs, as non-marketers of the music, it is the work in genre studies of Fabian Holt and Jennifer C. Lena that most applies to my argument. Holt is not writing about the Black bandworld per se, but when he states that “specialized cultures, occasionally crossing genre boundaries, are organized according to musics of a particular culture area [*the South and the HBCU diaspora*] or an instrument [*brass, woodwind and percussion instrumentation*],” his ideas can be applied to this group of people.<sup>191</sup> The “influential fan communities [*bandheads*],” whose description of genre is “identified not only with music, but also with certain cultural values, rituals, practices, territories, traditions, and groups of people,” have created their own set of musical criteria, with not all but some band music being held in high esteem.<sup>192</sup>

Lena argues that genre is not in relation to a style such as jazz and rock, which she is deliberate in differentiating from, but is a “system of orientations, expectations, and conventions that bind together industry, performers, critics, and fans in making what they identify as a distinctive sort of music.”<sup>193</sup> She feels that “genre exists when there is some consensus that a distinctive style of music is being performed.”<sup>194</sup> To cite former Morehouse student Joshua Snell once more, the multi-genre musical playlist he offered as important to the Atlanta University Center student body included industry standard definitions, but also terms they had defined for

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<sup>190</sup> Stock arrangements are shunned within the Black bandworld.

<sup>191</sup> Fabian Holt, *Genre in Popular Music* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2007), 6.

<sup>192</sup> Simon Frith, *Performing Rites* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1996), 88; Holt, 19, 21.

<sup>193</sup> Jennifer C. Lena, *Banding Together: How Communities Create Genres in Popular Music* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2012), 6, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt7rrzb>.

<sup>194</sup> *Ibid.*

themselves. Party rap, throwbacks, and band music may be atypical designations, but band music is clearly an established genre to them, and to the thousands of other people who fill parking lots, stadiums, gymnasiums, parade areas, and arenas to listen.<sup>195</sup>

These people, in Lena's estimation, are part of a "genre community," which is similar to Holt's "fan communities" or "genre scenes" because they are all designations for groups of individuals who are like-minded and have formed a collective around an idea.<sup>196</sup> In this instance, the collective is centered around the music created in Black marching band culture. Holt estimates that "genre scenes are translocal because they share ideas and representations of the same genre with scenes and other cities and often positioned themselves in relation to each other, with competing localized conceptions or branches of the genre."<sup>197</sup> These "localized conceptions" correlate to the sound of the band being relative to the SWAC versus MEAC conference alignment, or to bands that crank versus bands that don't, which will be covered in greater detail in Chapter 2.<sup>198</sup>

Holt also questions why some genres are marginalized in the discourse of academic musical conversation.<sup>199</sup> When historicizing American popular music, the portrayal of marching bands as sought-after ensembles leads to information about individual composers and conductors who are considered leaders of the medium. The middlebrow placement of marching and concert

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<sup>195</sup> Joshua Snell, "Plug In: How Music Shapes Our HBCU Experience."

<sup>196</sup> Lena, 6, 9.

<sup>197</sup> Holt, 19.

<sup>198</sup> The SWAC is the South Western Athletic Conference, the MEAC is the Mid-Eastern Athletic Conference, the CIAA is the Central Intercollegiate Athletic Association, and the SIAC is the Southern Intercollegiate Athletic Conference. Please see the appendix for the school-to-conference breakdown. Not all HBCU bands are in these conferences, or in HBCU-specific conferences anymore. North Carolina A&T is in the Big South Conference and Tennessee State is in the Ohio Valley Conference and only has one HBCU scheduled for the 2023 season. Milburn, a former member of bands in both the SWAC and the MEAC, uses her own experience and testimony from band directors to make a comparison in sound and approach between bands in the SWAC, which arguably tend to focus on power and aggression, versus bands in the MEAC, that perceptually don't.

<sup>199</sup> Holt, 152.

bands in the American cultural hierarchy – too dignified to be lowbrow, but not elite enough to be situated next to the symphony orchestra – is what has allowed ensembles to be flexible with their repertoire, and appeal to a wide range of listeners.<sup>200</sup> In the *Grove Dictionary of American Popular Music*, the legacy of John Philip Sousa, known for his march compositions and touring concert band, is described as follows:

In his era Sousa was a phenomenon of the entertainment world. He and his band had a remarkable impact on the musical tastes of America, and because of their collective artistry they put America's best foot forward in travels abroad. The band was regarded as the foremost ensemble of its kind during an era known as the "golden age of bands." The musical organization Sousa created was a phenomenon in itself...At the turn of the 20th century Sousa was possibly the most widely known name in music. People on both sides of the Atlantic were dancing the two-step to his Washington Post, bands everywhere were playing his marches, and both sheet music and recordings were selling briskly.<sup>201</sup>

However, in the same text, under the entry for "Popular Music" his name and music are not mentioned.<sup>202</sup> The authors of the entry argue that the term is hard to define, but the focus is squarely on American popular song. Although the popularity of ragtime cannot be denied, large ensemble, instrumental music is eschewed in general. Sousa and others during "the golden age" of the instrumental format's popularity are left out, and band music is not constructed as popular in this text. Considering that Sousa was a person who seemed to be financially successful and a worldwide figure in American music, this seems to be a gross oversight.

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<sup>200</sup> Lawrence W. Levine, *Highbrow/Lowbrow: The Emergence of Cultural Hierarchy in America* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1988), 165; D. Antoinette Handy, *Black Women in American Bands and Orchestras* (Metuchen: Scarecrow Press, 1981), 8.

<sup>201</sup> Paul E. Bierley and H. Wiley Hitchcock, "Sousa, John Philip," in *The Grove Dictionary of American Music* (Oxford University Press, 2013), <https://www.oxfordreference.com/view/10.1093/acref/9780195314281.001.0001/acref-9780195314281-e-7878>.

<sup>202</sup> Charles Hamm, Robert Walser, Jacqueline Warwick, and Charles Hiroshi Garrett, "Popular music," in *The Grove Dictionary of American Music* (Oxford University Press, 2013), <https://www.oxfordreference.com/view/10.1093/acref/9780195314281.001.0001/acref-9780195314281-e-6653>.

Under the leadership of James Reese Europe, the 369th Infantry Regiment of the 39th Division Harlem Hellfighters Band included vernacular music in their repertoire. Without considering the high-versus-low cultural implications attached, they played arrangements of “traditional Protestant hymns, Negro spirituals, ragtime ditties, and popular blues numbers,” which linked Black taste to musicality expressed through the band medium.<sup>203</sup> However, because his music included ragtime syncopation and blues-like vocalization sounds on the horn, but excluded improvisation and swinging rhythms, the discourse on his group and their contribution to African-American music is inconsistent.<sup>204</sup> Some scholars define the music as jazz, while others don’t. There was not, and still isn’t, a universally accepted definition of the Black marching band aesthetic and its place in popular culture.

Part of the work that Beyoncé does involves giving the wider world a glimpse of herself as a young, Black girl from Houston, and what her childhood consisted of musically. She has made it clear, via her own musical expression, that Black band traditions are centralized in her vision. She was aware of two of the bands in or near the area, the Texas Southern Ocean of Soul and the PVAMU Marching Storm, and she frequented Battle of the Band events as a youth. With her *Homecoming* (2019) tour, live album, and Netflix documentary, she has placed the band alongside herself in the popular sphere. With her cover of the universally loved “Before I Let Go” (2019), she blended Atlanta-based, Don P. Roberts–vetted, show-style band alumni with her own crew of musicians during the marching band portion of the song.<sup>205</sup> The choice of

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<sup>203</sup> Michael D. Dinwiddie, “World War I: The Harlem Hellfighters,” in *Music and War in the United States*, 1st edition, ed. Sarah Mahler Kraaz (United Kingdom: Routledge, 2018), 123–124, <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315194981>.

<sup>204</sup> David Gilbert, “Clef Club Inc.: James Reese Europe and New York's Musical Marketplace,” *Journal of Popular Music Studies* 24, no. 4 (2012): 431, <https://doi.org/10.1111/jpms.12002>; Tim Brooks, *Lost Sounds: Blacks and the Birth of the Recording Industry 1890–1919* (Urbana-Champaign: University of Illinois, 2005), 285.

<sup>205</sup> Good Day Atlanta, “Marching Band Leader Don P. Roberts on Good Day Atlanta,” *Good Day Atlanta* [multimedia portal], May 21, 2019, <https://www.fox5atlanta.com/good-day-atlanta/marching-band-leader-don-p->

superimposing the bass line and harmonic material from Cameo’s “Candy” (1986) into the remake could be thought of as risky, because both pieces occupy a place of high esteem in Black culture, but the savvy and effective point of departure garnered a positive response from audiences. “Before I Let Go” is the signature song by Frankie Beverly and Maze, released on their *Live In New Orleans* (1981) album and is considered “the foundation of musical excellence for generations of listeners” in the African-American community.<sup>206</sup> It is played at block parties, cookouts, and by multiple show-style bands, and is performed by Maze at their closing of the Essence Festival every year. Beyoncé’s inclusion of the marching band interlude functioned as an homage to a culture she was raised in, and to make the song more Bayou City, more “hers.”

Even though the idea of band music as Black genre was not verbally stated by all the bandheads I interviewed the contemporary values they hold as a “genre community” give them the ability to define the music as such. This designation is not the choice of industry impresarios, academics, or historians, who have failed to interact with people within this ecosystem, but it is the creators and consumers of this culture who can make this determination. It is a concept that I didn’t recognize as a band member in the 1990s. Now, as both researcher and “oldhead,” I know Hip-Hop became integrated with band music in the same manner that other forms of music have – as the source material for a newly conceived genre.<sup>207</sup> I arrived at this conclusion not only through my discussion with Trenton Hunter, but also through fellowshiping with people who live the yard–neighborhood connection. Through attending numerous events where bands and

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roberts-on-good-day-atlanta; Maya A. Jones, “Exclusive: Why Beyonce went with HBCUs at Coachella,” *Andscape* [media portal], April 22, 2018, <https://andscape.com/features/beyonce-coachella-hbcu-performers-life-changing-moment/>.

<sup>206</sup> Lauren Porter, “Black Music Month: The Oral History of Maze Featuring Frankie Beverly’s ‘Before I Let Go,’” *Essence* [online], October 26, 2020, <https://www.essence.com/entertainment/black-music-month-oral-history-maze-featuring-frankie-beverly-before-i-let-go/>.

<sup>207</sup> An “oldhead” is a former participant who is seen by current members as a mentor.

DJs produce sound that affirms Blackness in a very routine manner, it becomes easy to hear the integration of Hip-Hop with Southern Soul, gospel, band music, and more.

### **Soundwalks and Sonic Real Estate**

When framing ecomusicological questions for his class on Southern Hip-Hop, scholar Justin Adams Burton took a regional approach in crafting ideas “revolving around soundscapes distinctive to the region.”<sup>208</sup> It is possible to draw intersections between region, race, and sound, as Zandria F. Robinson has done in her writing. Although she warns readers not to look at Black Southerners monolithically, she aims to “[situate] regional identity, like other forms of identity, as a strategically negotiated accomplishment, one based on shared, though contested, understandings of what it means to be a [B]lack southerner.”<sup>209</sup> In her estimation, part of this identity construction is through cross-genre blues expression. Similar to band music absorbing multiple elements of Blackness, Robinson argues that “blues in its various forms, including funk, soul, neo-soul, and [Hip-Hop], remains the language through which southern [B]lack identity is articulated in the post-soul era.”

It should not be surprising that different forms of Black music are referenced in conjunction with HBCU athletic activity. Unlike the PWI football experience, which is geared toward general audiences, HBCU tailgating and football events occur as another extension of the yard into the neighborhood. Music serves as one element in cultivating a welcoming atmosphere for a cross section of people. Sayvon J.L. Foster writes:

Through establishing a space where non-sport components of the university can exist, with consideration that big-time college sports have often pitted these components against each other, the HBCU sporting space serves as a sanctuary for different student communities. Building upon the communal nature of the

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<sup>208</sup> Justin Adams Burton, “Welcome to the Dirty South: Listening to the Politics of Southern Hip-Hop in a Ecomusicological Framework,” *Journal of Music History Pedagogy* 8, no. 1 (2017): 28.

<sup>209</sup> Zandria F. Robinson, *This Ain't Chicago: Race, Class, and Regional Identity in the Post-Soul South* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2014), 19.

HBCU sporting space, a collection of contributors alluded to this space serving as a form of sanctuary for all components of the HBCU sport experience, e.g., band, dance, food, academics, and student life.<sup>210</sup>

His argument is supported by proclamations found on social media. Comments he cited under the theme of “HBCU Sporting Sanctuary” summed up the rationale attendees had for patronizing these events when saying, “It’s the band, the halftime show breakdown, cheerleaders, the fans, PA announcer, the wave!... An experience like no other.”<sup>211</sup>

Within this sanctuary is where I focus on the band and DJ as sources of sound at tailgates and football games held during Jackson State’s Fall 2022 season. Understanding how sound is received illuminates the integration of music as a whole in these spaces. It’s already been established that band music is a Black genre to this community, therefore it shouldn’t be surprising that any style of music that resonates is going to be referenced. Not all events I went to were in Jackson, giving some variance in taste, but there was a strong focus on the city in this portion of the research, because that’s where I was living from September 2022 to June 2023.

In addition to games and tailgates, I also include data taken from sponsored Battle of the Bands showcases. Unlike any battles that occur in conjunction with football games, these structured events were created as secondary, tertiary, or summer band competitions or entertainment vehicles. Although bands are the focus, there are still DJs providing interim sound. I only address the general atmosphere and the contributions the DJ makes to sounding during these affairs.

When submerging yourself in this type of environment, either through conducting a soundwalk or sitting in the stands, you become engulfed in the aural material that penetrates your

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<sup>210</sup> Sayvon JL. Foster, “You Gotta Be There: A Thematic Content Analysis of the Historically Black College and University Sporting Experience,” *Communication & Sport* 0, no. 0 (2022): 18, <https://doi.org/10.1177/21674795221125787>.

<sup>211</sup> *Ibid.*, 16.

sense of hearing. Burton draws on Schafer when relaying that the focus should be “on events heard, not objects seen.”<sup>212</sup> Taking advice from professors, I transformed myself from simply an eyewitness into an “earwitness,” by audio recording first-hand accounts instead of only taking written notes.<sup>213</sup> In this instance, the ears became prominent, and the eyes secondary in experiencing the music, voices of old friends and acquaintances, and the ever-present generators that power tailgate proceedings.

Although I did take some video evidence, it was done with the purpose of documenting the response people had to the sounds while negotiations took place amongst parties maneuvering for sonic real estate. I addressed the groups of people at the tailgates, sometimes right across from each other, who were playing music over their sound system set-ups; the fans of opposing teams and bands were talking trash to each other; and the bands were playing over the stadium announcer, the invasive stadium scoreboard advertisements, the stadium DJ’s music, or each other. All of this aural information mimics a pot of gumbo, all mixed together, with Hip-Hop as one of the ingredients.

In this analogy, I deliberately compare Hip-Hop to one element of the dish that is the foundation – the roux. In this case, the people resemble that base concoction, and like the flour and fat, the roles they play in emitting and receiving sound are what’s most important. Throughout my time in the field, the role of the DJ, and the DJ’s ability to claim real estate, was more considerable than anticipated. Even so, a soundwalk (or sound-sit while in stadiums and gymnasiums) is not just about music, it’s about the complete sonic environment. I sought to

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<sup>212</sup> Murray R. Schafer, *The Soundscape: Our Sonic Environment and the Tuning of the World* (Rochester, VT: Destiny Books, 1994), 7.

<sup>213</sup> *Ibid.*, 8–9.

garner as much meaning as possible from the five tailgating and football games where I conducted fieldwork.

Gathering this information led to interesting encounters. “Put me on the radio,” a man exclaimed as I walked by. This was the second person at the Alcorn versus JSU tailgate who thought that my earphones plugged in to my Zoom recorder indicated that I was a radio journalist. After I explained that I was conducting a soundwalk, we engaged in some good-hearted fan banter about our respective NFL football teams (him Cowboys, me Raiders) before I went on my way. November 19th was my fourth tailgate observation, but only my second time recording sounds specifically for documentation purposes. The tailgating scene was still new to me, because I only attended games, as an undergraduate, as a member of the band. I had no idea of the sights, smells, and sounds of all the fun that took place until my return to Jackson for homecoming in 2013.

As with most gatherings with Black folks, music played a large part, and it was everywhere. Tents featuring live musicians were a pleasant surprise at the Southern Heritage Classic tailgate, in Memphis, on September 9th.<sup>214</sup> Sound system set-ups, sometimes with a DJ on the decks, and others without, were the rule of the day, and were common during all five observations. Examples of this were seen on October 22nd, in sponsored booths.

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<sup>214</sup> The Southern Heritage Classic (SHC) is a neutral-site football game held in Memphis, Tennessee, between primarily Jackson State and Tennessee State. Played since 1990, the idea was for the two fanbases to meet in between Jackson and Nashville, where Tennessee State is located, making travel easier for event goers. The proceedings have grown into a larger event with a high school battle of the bands and concerts with the groups like The O’Jays. Jackson State ended its contract with the event, and played its last SHC in 2022. Arkansas Pine Bluff is contracted to play in 2023 and 2024; Cecelia Payne Wright, “The Southern Heritage Classic: The Evolution of an Event,” *Southern Heritage Classic–History* [website], <https://southernheritageclassic.com/about-us/classic-history/>.



Figure 1.1: Zaytoven DJing Jackson State University’s tailgate, Oct. 22, 2022.

The ESPN Heisman House, featuring writer and on-air personality Clinton Yates on the microphone and Grammy Award winning producer Zaytoven (Xavier Dotson) as DJ, featured Hip-Hop, but I’m not sure if most fans realized who the trap music architect was (see Figure 1.1). Grambling Dining Services focused on offering free samples of food, rather than having a DJ, on September 17th. They attracted patrons to their booth with clean versions of Hip-Hop in their DJ-less set-up.

People were jostling for sonic real estate, but also understanding that when carving out aural space there was going to be some overlap. Various songs that stood out were unexpected, like “Everlasting Bass” (1987) from the California group Rodney-O & Joe Cooley. Some were highly appropriate. The Boyz II Men, New Jack Swing sounds of *A Different World* opening credits theme matched the homecoming backdrop for Jackson State. Others were staples, like UGK’s “International Players Anthem (I Choose You)” (2007), which features OutKast, or

uncomfortable, like the explicit “My Neck, My Back (Lick It)” (2001) by Khia.<sup>215</sup> There were a vast number of songs I didn’t recognize, like Kid Ink featuring Chris Brown’s “Main Chick” (2014), and some that were unidentifiable due to sounds blending together.

When DJs play recordings of the Sonic Boom, attendees take notice (see Figure 1.2). One played the JSU version of “Neck” while adding airhorn effects. He transitioned into “Everything” (1988), which most bandheads call “Coming To America,” as it is recognized from the Eddie Murphy classic film. He then interjected speech into the equation.



Figure 1.2: DJ (name unknown) playing band music over his system.

His call of “We gettin’ ready for game time,” reinforced the sense of place established with the band’s music. This idea works on a higher level with the Sonic Boom’s version of the classic

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<sup>215</sup> UGK or Underground Kingz consists of Chad “Pimp-C” Butler (deceased) and Bernard “Bun-B” Freeman.

Hip-Hop tune “The Show” (1986). It is thoroughly distinguished as a JSU song in the bandworld. At the Grambling tailgate, DJ Unpredictable incorporated this song into his Hip-Hop set, to the delight of fans.

During football games themselves, if there is a lull in the action on the field, or when bands are moving between the stands and the field before and after halftime, the DJ will play music. The tension between bands and other sounds in the stadium is not as pronounced as it is at PWI football games, but more HBCU contests are starting to be televised on ESPN, which relinquishes control of the sonic real estate that HBCU bands have always maintained. As McCluskey notes, at PWI games, authority is wielded by a producer who controls the narrative of sound from the band, the DJ or sound booth, the advertisements on the video board, and the cheerleaders.<sup>216</sup> In these settings, all sounds are scripted.

Truthfully, there are different procedures at play here. The intricacies of show-style bands battling are covered in Chapter 3, but now, I introduce the pre-game battle, known as “Zero Quarter,” because the struggle for sonic real estate is evident. This period of time is not a clear space for the bands to sound. Whatever advertisements, dedications, or announcements that are scripted, these sounds need to work around the battle in the eyes of fans. Game officials or TV producers, however, don’t want bands to be completely autonomous. During the JSU versus GSU game, the announcer tried to take on the role of the producer. “Sonic Boom, if you may hold your playing please. The game will be televised and we have to try to stick to the script as much as possible.” An outlet for band media is *Show style Talk*, headed by Human Jukebox alum Jerome Law, which is part of his Bandhead Media Network. The program is a panel format show where the group watches, then scores, battles and field shows; they also share information about

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<sup>216</sup> John Michael McCluskey, “Music as Narrative in American College Football (PhD diss., University of Kentucky, 2016), 131, <http://dx.doi.org/10.13023/ETD.2016.127>.

events, hirings, and other news in the bandworld. They don't usually review Zero Quarters, because of other sounds competing with the bands. Before concluding that the JSU/GSU Zero Quarter was not a worthwhile review, the panel directed a particular amount of contempt toward the DJ at PVAMU games, who they saw as interfering.<sup>217</sup>

In my own experience, we didn't have a producer attempting to direct sonic traffic during my time in the band, and it isn't a position that would have been openly welcomed. In fact, when I attended the Southern University versus University of Georgia (UGA) game in 2015, in Athens, Georgia, the Human Jukebox didn't adhere to the usual protocols of mainstream college football. They played over the scoreboard advertisements, and more often than the University of Georgia Redcoat Marching Band. Yet when PWIs play HBCUs during their home games, they usually write provisions into the contract that the marching band must travel with the football team, as UGA did with Southern.<sup>218</sup> People seemed appreciative of the musical display The Human Jukebox provided.

There wasn't any friction between the DJ and the band at the smaller Southern Intercollegiate Athletic Conference (SIAC) game between Albany State University and Miles College that I attended, but these bands did not play as often. There wasn't even a Zero Quarter. There were times at SWAC games when the bands and DJs were sounding over each other, which resembled a bowl of mush. The DJ, however, provided memorable moments of crowd engagement. When Unpredictable played DMXs' "Party Up (Up In Here)" (1999) and "Ruff

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<sup>217</sup> Show Style Talk, *Show Style Talk - Band Podcast* (4-19-23) "Band News/Karr vs Whitehaven/JsU vs Gsu Zero Recap," video, 19:15, April 19, 2023, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-PbbxE-GMFs>.

<sup>218</sup> Mark Aumann, "Southern's 'Human Jukebox' Band Wows Sanford Stadium," *NCAA (National Collegiate Athletics Association)* [website], September 26, 2015, <https://www.ncaa.com/news/football/article/2015-09-26/southern-human-jukebox-band-wows-sanford-stadium-crowd>.

Ryders' Anthem" (1998), and later, King George's Southern Soul hit song "Keep On Rollin" (2022), the whole stadium sang along with the melodic material.

As for the sonic environment at Battle of the Band events, the first one I attended was for collegiate bands, and held in Houston in 2021. The DJ was not visible in NRG Stadium, but the music still kept the crowd energized. The other battles I went to in 2022 and 2023 featured high school and summer bands, and were not held in professional football stadiums. The DJ was visibly present and sometimes doubled as host. At the very least, DJs provided the public announcement system.



Figure 1.3: DJ providing sound and music at a battle.

At the 2022 Independence Day Showdown in Jackson, music was played before the contest started and during intervals of downtime from the bands (see Figure 1.3). Dancing was encouraged during this period, as patrons had moved to the field for the second part of the battle. I did not expect line dancing to commence, with people sliding to the left and right while following the directions of Cupid's (Bryson Bernard) "Flex" (2021). The announcer brought attention to an impromptu performance from entertainer and fitness instructor Tay Cheesy

(Taylor Akharume), who showcased her mastery of the Jiggin' dance style when the DJ played Southern Hip-Hop.<sup>219</sup> Although the ensembles were the primary draw for bandheads, they expected an immersive experience where the bands and the DJ shared the sonic real estate, and provided entertainment at the appropriate times.

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<sup>219</sup> Jiggin' is a dance style from Baton Rouge, Louisiana, that has been converted into a fitness system. <https://www.facebook.com/TaylorAkharume/>; <https://www.jiggaerobicsfitness.com/>.

## Conclusion

There are several threads to follow when trying to understand this ecosystem of students and music educators, instrumentalist and bandheads, and practitioners and impresarios, who have collectively accepted the marching ensemble and the music they make as part of the popular sphere. I used Banfield's work as a foundation to house evidence concerning the overall meaning that music and sound hold for actors within the Black bandworld. Using my own background and interactions to compare the learning environment between corps-style and show-style, I offered some models of presentation to start, but I also drew upon Allen, McCreary, and respondents to illustrate the magnitude and importance of the yard as a place of gathering, growth, and musical engagement for the entire student body. Through necessity, neighborhoods near the HBCU campus became a symbiotic partner, with this yard-neighborhood aesthetic being extended by the diasporic spread of HBCU alumni throughout the country. It's important to remember that within these spaces genre communities have formed to create their own determinations about music, outside of the influence of the music industry. This is especially true in the South, where there is a history of professional instrumentalists being trained in church or public school music programs, and Hip-Hop practitioners being versed in band culture and having access to these musicians. Music that the marching band plays can be representative of any and all sounds valued by community members.

The DJ or people with sound system set-ups also take a prominent, although contested role here, in a negotiation for sonic real estate at events. HBCU homecoming festivities, pre-game tailgates, football games, Battle of the Band contests, parades, or any other venue imaginable where you may hear a former high school band member rapping their own song along with a collegiate band are all instances that, according to Zandria F. Robinson, help in

shaping Southern Black identity. If we truly live in a condition of there being “two Americas,” then I and others drawn into this relationship, African-American, Southern, or not, can be found in the bandworld where these connections are made clear.

## Chapter 2: CRANKING AS CULTURAL SIGNIFIER OR DIVIDER

Black ethnomusicologists Portia K. Maultsby and Mellonne V. Burnim have both written extensively on the history and development of African descended interventionist musical practices in the New World. Burnim, a gospel music scholar and pianist, identified one of these characteristics as sound quality, when referring specifically to gospel music, while Maultsby extended Burnim's idea to Black musical aesthetics in general.<sup>220</sup> She writes that “the unique sound associated with [B]lack music results from the manipulation of timbre, texture, and shading in ways uncommon to Western practice, [with] Black instrumentalists [producing] a wide range of vocally derived sounds. They create these sounds by altering traditional embouchure, playing techniques, and fingerings and adding distorting devices.”<sup>221</sup>

This manner of sounding can be seen as either unwelcoming or harnessed purposefully for expressive purposes. À la Jimi Hendrix, the once experimental technique of using distortion is now embraced by some, but disregarded by others. In seeking answers about Hip-Hop, another Black counter-cultural musical art form, Tricia Rose formed questions during her early study of the genre, when linking Black cultural priorities to the creation and consumption of the music. She surmised that:

Rap music centers on the quality and nature of rhythm and sound, the lowest, “fattest beats,” being the most significant and emotionally charged...Rap music revises Black cultural priorities via new and sophisticated technological means....These revisions do not take place in a cultural and political vacuum, they are played out on a cultural and commercial terrain that embraces Black cultural products.<sup>222</sup>

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<sup>220</sup> Mellonne Burnim, “The Black Gospel Music Tradition: A Complex of Ideology, Aesthetic, and Behavior,” in *More than Dancing: Essays on Afro-American Music and Musicians*, ed. Irene V. Jackson (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1985), 154.

<sup>221</sup> Portia K. Maultsby, “Africanisms in African-American Music,” 191–192.

<sup>222</sup> Tricia Rose, *Black Noise: Rap Music and Black Culture in Contemporary America* (Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 1994), 64–65.

Rose alludes to a regular practice she witnessed in recording studios, which defied established knowledge employed by audio engineers, when crafting her argument for Hip-Hop specific practices.<sup>223</sup> Rose uses the metaphor of “working in the red.”<sup>224</sup> In order for Hip-Hop practitioners to get the desired sound sought while recording, they would ask engineers to allow the volume meters to go into the red, which signals distortion. This would result in tenuous situations in the studio due to most engineers being White men – with a sound palette coming from a background in rock, pop, or jazz – having to listen to Black clients whose traditional musical knowledge was limited, but whose music knowledge base was unknown at the time. In the 80s, most did not accept Hip-Hop as music.<sup>225</sup> These engineers were certainly not open to taking instruction from emcees, DJs, and producers whose process they neither understood nor respected. A Tribe Called Quest, Erykah Badu, and The Roots engineer and collaborator Bob Power was frank during a lecture for The Red Bull Music Academy’s 2004 session in support of this point.

Hip-Hop was really the fulcrum, the point at which a lot of things changed, about popular music and how it’s made...A lot of old school people, including engineers, got really resentful when Hip-Hop came around, because they say: A) “this isn't music, B) that's not the right way to do things, C) they [Hip-Hop artists] don't know about X, Y, Z, so they don't deserve this”... But you know, engineering at that point was a very skilled “White male boy’s locker room”...And a lot of guys got pushed out of the business, because they couldn’t adapt.<sup>226</sup>

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<sup>223</sup> In my own research, I go into detail about the impact of Jamaican music creation on Hip-Hop. Many of the Hip-Hop practices were derived from techniques created in Jamaican recording studios or by sound system crews.

<sup>224</sup> This “red” she is referencing is from Full Scale (FS) Meters measure volume in Digital Audio Workstations, like Pro-Tools, and audio engineering expertise which holds that the sound coming through the DAW should not be so loud that it would cause the meters to move from green, through yellow, and into the red: this would indicate distortion, which is unwanted. <https://www.musicianonamission.com/vu-meter/>. These meters are also on mixing boards; [https://www.bhphotovideo.com/lit\\_files/79398.pdf](https://www.bhphotovideo.com/lit_files/79398.pdf).

<sup>225</sup> Mario Armstrong Media, “Inside Chung King Studios Fuse TV)” *Fuse TV*, video, 03:30, YouTube, July 19, 2013, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZGLLeSgphlFc>.

<sup>226</sup> Torsten Schmidt, “Bob Power,” *Red Bull Music Academy Interview*, transcript and video, 02:47:59, Red Bull Website, 2014, <http://www.redbullmusicacademy.com/lectures/bob-power-it-always-takes-longer>.

It is, as Cheryl L. Keyes asserts, an “African-American Music Sound Culture” that embraces material created from working in the red that is valued by some and shunned by others.<sup>227</sup> When applying this concept to HBCU band culture, different styles and philosophical approaches to ensemble playing and sound are noticeable, with one being both highly debated, and linked to Black identity: cranking.



Figure 2.1: A flyer for “Crank Fest” promotes this term.

<sup>227</sup> Cheryl L. Keyes, “The Aesthetic Significance of African American Sound Culture and Its Impact on American Popular Music Style and Industry,” *The World of Music* 45, no. 3 (2003): 106, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/41699526>.

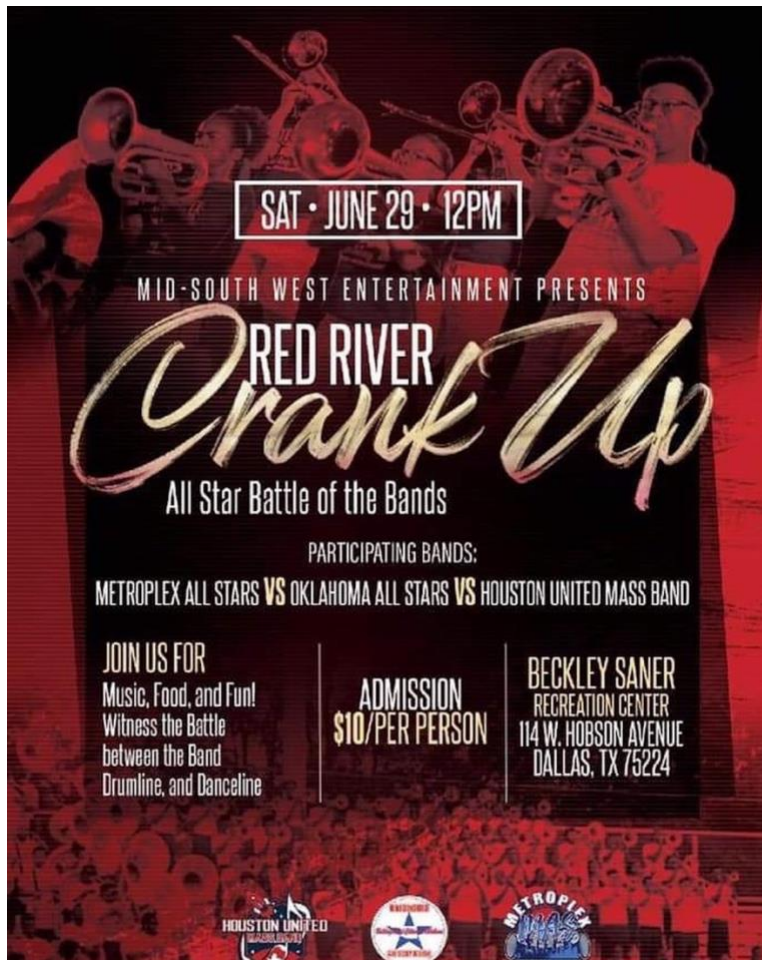


Figure 2.2: An advertisement for a battle, foregrounding cranking.

Cranking, crankin', to crank on, or get cranked on are all variations of an arranging and performance practice that has a different definition and connotation depending upon who you ask. As a regularly used term among bandheads, and taken to another level with sponsored events named “Crank Fest,” “Crank-It-Up-Fest,” or “Crank Up or Go Home,” these words elicit images and feelings from those in the bandworld that signify Blackness (see Figures 2.1 and 2.2). Bands’ cranking should be compared to Hip-Hop producers or audio engineers working in the red because they reject the symphonic sounds that many pedagogues feel are standard practice. Show-style bands have found a community that not only supports their performance style, but openly encourages it.

With cranking there are four sets of individuals who are part of the continuum: the arrangers who write the music to be cranked; the educators who embrace this performance practice and instruct students accordingly; the ensembles who profess feelings of satisfaction when executing the act of cranking with music that was written in this manner, or when altering parts to convert non-krankable tunes into those determined as such; and finally, the bandheads and music educators who receive this sound and judge bands based off of what they hear. People who are members in various marching arts communities, across ethnic lines, connect these assessments to Black identity affirmatively or negatively, with actors within the Black bandworld adding the aspect of region or HBCU athletic conference affiliation to their appraisal. The problem is that most opinions lack subtlety, with parameters of Blackness and Whiteness being strictly negotiated through sound aesthetics on social media and in real-time.

In this chapter, I present a nuanced view of the performance practice and arranging aspects of cranking. Various perspectives will be shared, starting with interpretations of what cranking actually is and how it is executed. What I attempt to do here is propose that cranking is a matter of sound preference and taste, especially with the incorporation of Southern Hip-Hop into band repertoire. There are ideas in Hip-Hop production, especially with crunk and trap, that correlate to the sounds bands make when cranking. I feel the incremental addition of Hip-Hop to band repertoire in the 2000s led to a change in style, but has also fed limited notions of Blackness with its incorporation. I look at what is known as the “blow that h\* mentality,” which one interlocutor described as just playing as loud as you can, in contrast to cranking specific repertoire, with tone, balance, and blend intact. It is rare that people on either side of this debate are going to listen at length to groups that embody one way of playing or the other, but in order

to see shades of gray it is important to understand the intricacies of the practice and why ensembles choose to partake, or not.

Cranking is not and should not be considered the only method used when playing music, nor should it be considered the definitive representation of Blackness in the African-American bandworld. Simply put, it is a mythical endeavor to try to classify one particular sound according to race, although attempts to do so have been imposed on Black musicians before.

Instrumentalists have routinely faced cultural typecasting from critics or well-meaning defenders in conjunction with sounding. George E. Lewis writes about the absence of freedom musicians have had to explore and draw upon various cultural influences en route to finding their sound.<sup>228</sup> This conundrum didn't completely hinder the careers of John Coltrane, Cecil Taylor, and Sun Ra, but race should not have been an inhibitor to their musical expression. They should have been allowed the freedom to use all methods and ideas for creating music that were at their disposal, as should any marching ensemble.

Tunes that are cranked need to be written in a particular manner, using extreme instrument range as an example. There is also a certain level of tolerance for alterations players make to the written arrangement for the purposes of converting tunes into what they feel is better for cranking. Cranking is but one tool in the box to use when appropriate, but not the only tool. It is better instead to recognize various techniques and musical devices, like vocalization on the horn, or syncopated rhythms that can be adopted when necessary, then to determine only one as a signifier. Black band ensembles have used a panoply of techniques, since the days of James Reese Europe, in order to distinguish themselves from their White counterparts, and make band repertoire culturally relevant to them.

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<sup>228</sup> George E. Lewis, *A Power Stronger Than Itself: The AACM and American Experimental Music* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2008), 33.

My counterexample to this one-size-fit-all motto draws on the legacy of the Florida A&M Marching 100, which is celebrated and maligned within the Black bandworld. For bandheads who equate cranking with Blackness, the Marching 100 are boring, with a sound comparable to a PWI-coded language for Whiteness. Their acceptance by mainstream music educators adds to the characterization assigned to the band, and to graduates of their program. In reality, their innovation in sound and pageantry have been a template for bands while maintaining an ethos that is shrouded in Blackness – a mantra that celebrates versatility that is inclusive of Hip-Hop and pleasing to Black audiences. In fact, musicians from FAMU have been funneled into the rare space of professional gigs for marching arts instrumentalists and have been celebrated by audiences worldwide.

Rose writes, “using the machines in ways they have not been intended, by pushing on established boundaries of music engineering, rap producers have developed an art out of recording with the sound meters well into the Distortion Zone. When necessary, they deliberately *work in the red* [emphasis Rose].”<sup>229</sup> Working in the red has become adjoined to an African-American Music Sound Culture, in which cranking is embedded. Rose writes that “Volume, density, and quality of low-sound frequencies are critical features in rap production,” without realizing that these same criteria could be applied to an instrumental ensemble.<sup>230</sup> If the symphonic sound that bands adhere to is the established boundary, then cranking pushes the fader up, allowing the sound to pass those limitations and creep into the areas that were once prohibited. Cranking should not be done without caution however, or be a restrictive trait for Black expression if applying the same boundaries that they’re supposed to obliterate. It should be

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<sup>229</sup> Rose, *Black Noise*, 75.

<sup>230</sup> *Ibid.*

thought of as an interventionist musical practice, ready to be applied when necessary. Cranking represents an ethos that musician and producer Terrace Martin embodied while making a beat for Busta Rhymes. When working in the studio, he told his audio engineer, “Turn it up... Touch the red... None of them rules they taught y’all... Them strange, expensive rules all y’all got. We gonna break all the rules today.”<sup>231</sup>

### **Cranking: What is it, and When Did it Start?**

Music educator Ernest Stackhouse Jr. created his blog, *Block Us Up*, to include the band director’s perspective in band content mediaspace. His article, “Cranking!: My Unnecessary Explanation for Those Who Need It,” was an opinion piece meant to provide an overview of what it means and how it is executed, even if there isn’t a standard definition for the term available. He begins with a review of commonly used dynamic levels, but quickly uses his own experience to demonstrate that they are not interpreted the same by all players.

In high school, anytime I played above forte (loud), my band director told me I was blasting. Based on his musical experiences, he had developed an interpretation of fortissimo that was different from what I, at the time, thought it meant to play very loud. When I entered [South Carolina State University], I quickly realized my interpretation of loud wasn’t loud enough. I was constantly told that I wasn’t “filling the horn up with air,” I wasn’t “blowing.” They proceeded to teach me; how to “blow,” how to do it while marching & dancing, and how to keep a characteristic sound with good tone quality and proper balance. Before long I had that dark, mature sound college band directors love for their tubas to have.<sup>232</sup>

Stackhouse believes “blowing” in past terminology is equivalent to “crankin’” now. He sees it as a style that can be abused if you don’t have a grasp on fundamentals based on the

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<sup>231</sup> All Def Music, “Busta Rhymes & Terrace Martin Make A Fire Beat On The Spot | The Crate | All Def Music,” *The Crate*, video, 03:27, YouTube, July 24, 2018, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MxhWwos14xQ>.

<sup>232</sup> Ernest Stackhouse Jr., “Cranking!: My Unnecessary Explanation For Those That Need It,” *Block Us Up!* [Blog] July 2, 2018, <https://blockusup.com/2018/07/02/cranking-my-unnecessary-explanation-for-those-that-need-it/>.

symphonic approach to performance. He uses the often-repeated phrase when claiming, “You have to know the rules before you can break them.”<sup>233</sup>

In a time before Twitter, message boards were active communication vehicles for like-minded communities, with bandheads creating threads with responses that were sure to follow. In trying to ascertain when cranking terminology emerged, reviewing old posts was a good place to start. Even here, people couldn’t agree. On two separate threads, both posted in 2010, there was not a consensus on what the term meant, or when it came into use.<sup>234</sup> An unfounded theory of mine is that the term was taken from Washington D.C. Go-Go Music, due to the term being branded on the genre, and the popularity of the style on HBCU campuses.<sup>235</sup> The problem is that E.U.’s “Da Butt” (1988) is the only Go-Go song some know, and the term is not used in its lyrics.

Claire Milburn transcribed portions of an interview from the band media site formerly known as meetmeonthe50.com, where we learn the origin of the word.<sup>236</sup> It is here that current Director of Bands for Southern University, “Kedric Taylor credited [former SU Director of Bands] Lawrence Jackson with coining the term ‘cranking.’ He says that many people now mean loud when they say ‘cranking,’ but the term was originally about the energy and aggression players display.”<sup>237</sup> Milburn herself defines it as “playing beyond practical ranges and dynamic

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<sup>233</sup> Ibid.

<sup>234</sup> “Cranking,” posted by Brandon, *Bandhead.org* [website], <https://bandhead.org/forum/topics/cranking-1>; “So What Exactly is Cranking/Yanking?? (Bandterms 1-On-1) College PPL Help Needed...I Cant Use Highschoolers Input,” posted by John. J, December 10, 2010, *Bandhead.org* [website], <https://bandhead.org/forum/topics/sowhat-exactly-is>.

<sup>235</sup> Lulu Garcia-Navarro, Charles “Shorty Corleone” Garris and Rico Anderson, January 31, 2021, “Up First-Sirius XM’s Crank Radio Gives Go-Go Music A National Platform,” in *Weekend Edition Sunday* [NPR audio and text], 05:25, <https://www.npr.org/2021/01/31/962529030/sirius-xms-crank-radio-gives-go-go-music-a-national-platform>.

<sup>236</sup> This interview has been removed. The webmaster and band alumni Eddie Evans has been rebranding his business as of late, and some of the content that was once available is no longer posted.

<sup>237</sup> Eddie Evans, *Eddie Evans Pro Show* [YouTube Portal], <https://www.youtube.com/@eddieevansproshow>; Claire Milburn, “An Oral History of Marching Band Traditions at Historically Black Colleges and Universities” (master’s thesis, Louisiana State University, 2019), 69.

levels, [that] essentially results in an uncharacteristic sound from a symphonic perspective,” and also “a playing style that transcends dynamic contrast and calls for pure brass-induced wattage...”<sup>238</sup> In Claire’s explanation, her citing of instrument ranges addresses how the music is written, and a description of how it should be played.

These three concepts, a symphonic sound, aggression, and energy, are all relevant because they represent philosophies in sonic expression that bands embody. The symphony orchestra, still symbolizing a level of high art and the standard of musical performance in the minds of many, is the model toward which some HBCU bands tailor their sound. Aggression through sound, as K. Taylor suggested, is related to cranking and will be covered in full in Chapter 3. Although he does not use the word cranking definitively, music educator and consultant Eric Jimenez also relates the word to energy, similar to K. Taylor and Jackson, when comparing show-style ensembles to corps-style groups. The need to do this was apparent to Jimenez because of the poor reputation show-style groups hold outside of the ecosystem. “We play with a lot more energy. I use the term energy versus loud because a lot of people have used different terms and coded terms to talk about our style of band, when it really is about just playing with more energy.”<sup>239</sup>

FAMU graduate and music educator Glenn Eichelberger also compares sound to energy, but assigns sonic markers to bands according to a MEAC/SWAC conference affiliation. “The MEAC sound is a lot more lushful because it has a lot more instrumentation... [They] try to emulate the symphonic band on the football field versus on the SWAC side. It’s more about

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<sup>238</sup> Ibid.; Ibid., 3.

<sup>239</sup> Mark J. Conner, “Episode 171 Eric Jimenez,” July 27, 2020, in *Everything Band Podcast*, produced by Mark J. Conner, podcast, MP3 audio, 28:18, <https://www.everythingbandpodcast.com/season-4/blog-post-title-one-5f9xe-bz4jd-tcwat-n6ndn-znzpe-bamrc-43rmb-dh379-73ws2-pa4zc-b6jak-4kfld-wx43s-24nw5-rnt7c-eesxe-nf3f2-8ynrs-23hhz-98jjj-km89w-ykfnw-sd8lk-78plt-jhhpk-zs7j2-tbsml-s4zdt-m7blf>.

power, but not necessarily about power. [They] just have a very energized sound.”<sup>240</sup> There are connotations of Blackness that bandheads attached to this sounding, which Eichelberger isn’t making. While this exploration will begin later in this chapter, he is accurately representing the Black bandworld when he says, “We do everything based off conference.”<sup>241</sup> This includes ideas about cranking.

Aspects of and ideas about this performance practice are not just drawn along conference lines; they can be seen as generational as well. Dowell Taylor was the Director of Bands of JSU in 1990, and along with arranger Paul I. Adams, was responsible for the sound I heard from the ensemble as a teenager. D. Taylor’s influence on the band started during the 1970s, when as an undergraduate, he provided over one hundred arrangements for the band.<sup>242</sup> His tenure finally ended after his second retirement in 2020. Over time, he noticed the change in repertoire and sound of HBCU bands, which permitted him to observe key elements needed for a successful program: “Musicality, musicianship, or professionalism...you must commit to those three elements. But because the music changes, you have to rely on percussion and tubas, and you play little snippets of the rap tune, and then it’s over. So, as a result, the music started getting louder and louder. Musicality started slipping out of the door, but it was louder and louder. So now..we are at an apex.”<sup>243</sup>

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<sup>240</sup> Mark J. Conner, “Episode 195 Glenn Eichelberger,” September 3, 2021, in *Everything Band Podcast*, produced by Mark J. Conner, podcast, MP3, 01:08:25, <https://www.everythingbandpodcast.com/season-5/blog-post-title-one-g47k3-wne7t-6w8xc-w7t24-bwkhe-hbz55-b4jt8-396pc-gwr73-hkx8w-e5cle-npnmk-t8tjh>.

<sup>241</sup> Ibid.

<sup>242</sup> Jackson Public Schools, “Alumni Spotlights–Dowell Taylor,” *Jackson Public Schools* [District Website], 2023, <https://www.jackson.k12.ms.us/site/default.aspx?PageType=3&ModuleInstanceID=33601&ViewID=7b97f7ed-8e5e-4120-848f-a8b4987d588f&RenderLoc=0&FlexDataID=37217&PageID=642>.

<sup>243</sup> Rodney D. Chism, “The Challenges of Balancing Personal and Professional Relationships Among Historically Black College and Universities (HBCUs) Band Directors,” (PhD diss., Liberty University, August 2021), 47.

While not taking a detour into the “loudness wars,” which relates to the amount of compression used on recorded popular music, plus the added compression music receives when broadcast over radio signals, the Tricia Rose concept of “working in the red” starts with Dowell Taylor’s characterization of the music being percussion and tuba heavy. Hip-Hop has influenced commercial music production across genres; therefore, if bass drum tunings are now inspired by Roland TR-808 kick timbres and tubas by 808 or minimoog basslines, there is going to be a heaviness attached to the music that is present now, where it did not exist before. Woodwinds and other brass instruments need to be voiced and played a certain way in order to cut through. For example, the elimination of flutes for piccolos, which project better in the upper register, can be categorized as a result of bands working in the red, in which the early 2000s can be pegged as the transitional phase.

Two graduates of JSU, who are of different generations and have a completely different sonic identity because of the gradual ubiquitousness of Hip-Hop, are enjoying careers as assistant band directors at HBCUs; their sound philosophies are reflective of this change. One of them was under the tutelage of Mr. Taylor and Mr. Adams for a lengthy period of time, and one was not. Although they both graduated from the same program, their thoughts on this topic differ, and I use them to display various perspectives about cranking.

Professor Stephanie Sanders is an established and respected presence in the music program at Norfolk State University and throughout the Black bandworld. She has raised the profile of the jazz program at the university during her charge, and directed a multi-college jazz ensemble during the 2023 HBCU National Band Directors’ Consortium Convention. She is consistently called upon as a performer, a tradition of HBCU music educators, highlighting her abilities on saxophone and bassoon. Her time directing the Spartan Legion has been spent

growing the national profile of the marching band, which was on display during the 2023 edition of the Tournament of Roses Parade. Comments on the musicality and showmanship of the band during the various performances in California were plentiful, with the Million Dollar Funk Squad Drumline making an especially huge impression on people unfamiliar with HBCU bands, or those who had had a singular opinion of them.

Part of my brief time spent with the Spartan Legion at a rehearsal in 2021 revealed a commitment to the balance, blend, and musicality of the ensemble, which was integrated into the R&B and Hip-Hop selections played, and their signature entrance tune, “Behold.” I was actually reminded of that same Adams-influenced sound I heard as a teenager, but updated. He taught a micro, impromptu lesson at the piano when I was at JSU where he stressed the relationship between voicings, frequency, and the overtone series in relation to ensemble projection across the football field. This philosophy is shared by Professor Sanders, as well as Mr. William Beatha, who is Director of Bands for the Legion. When Sanders was asked during an interview about issues troubling her with HBCU bands, cranking was at the top of the list.

This damn crankin’ [mess] is botherin’ me. Everybody just playin’ loud. That’s just like...*[raises her voice to yell]* everybody talkin’ loud like this all the time. You know you can’t do this all the time and talk to everybody loud, [because] can’t nobody be soft. So when somebody comes up bein’ soft, it’s like what the hell is goin’ on? [Because] everybody “Rah Rah Rah, Rah Rah Rah!”... Be musical, if we’re a band. We do need to play some music. We need to play it up to par. The distinction about HBCU bands is that we can rock [a] march just as well as we can whatever the greatest tune is on the radio. That’s the musicality that we lose...<sup>244</sup>

While Sanders is not alone in her description of cranking’s relationship to playing loud, playing at volume is not always thought of negatively. Krystain Coleman started at Alcorn in

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<sup>244</sup> Passion Is..., “Talk That Talk - Episode 71 Giving the Flowers - Prof. Stephanie Sanders,” video, 1:11:08, YouTube, March 8, 2023, [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iX10viz\\_zk0](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iX10viz_zk0).

2013. “Playing loud all the time,” was something she was accustomed to and enjoyed doing.<sup>245</sup>

What’s interesting here is that many who partake in cranking would disagree with Coleman’s and Sander’s interpretation of the term.

Trenton Hunter began working as Assistant Band Director and Chief Arranger of the Texas Southern Ocean of Soul in 2021. He is a member of a formidable staff assembled and headed by Director of Bands Brian Simmons. Texas Southern still plays a variety of songs with blend and dynamic contrast, but the bite that cranking can give a band is used in the manner he describes it. I quote him at length, having asked him to define the practice, because his explanation is nuanced and detailed, which does not always occur when this emotionally charged topic gets broached:

This has evolved over the years. When most people in an academic setting, most band directors, say the word “crank,” it has a negative connotation on it. It’s almost like a mindless, [no] thought put into it, no nuance type of playin’ where you’re just blowing as loud as you can. And that can be the case. With me crankin’ is more like reaching a level of Nirvana to me. All these elements are just hitting on point...You’re executing the music how the directors want it. Your harmonies make sense. Your melodies are coming through when they need to. The articulations are in the right spot. You have different dynamic highlights – peaks and valleys...and you add projection. Now that’s that part that people always have a problem with. That people call it playing loud. But honestly, volume is relative...Yes, something can be loud, but how do you do loud? That’s the key thing with crankin’ to me. So once you have all those other things together. I tell my students all the time, “We have all those things together, not let’s just twist the knob up, and raise that volume some more. We’re raising it to the peak, where we’re still having that controlled sound, and it’s still there, but we’re just at our max level of projection.” That’s what crankin’ is to me. Where you have everything in place, and your band can go to their peak...Some people don’t see it like that. It kinda gets into a generational thing also. I think it’s just a new word comin’ to play... It’s a lot of levels to it. It’s all about preference.<sup>246</sup>

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<sup>245</sup> Krystain Coleman, interview with author, January 27, 2022.

<sup>246</sup> Trenton Hunter, interview with the author, September 2021.

As a band, TxSU is establishing a sound and style that embraces this definition of cranking, but doesn't rely on it as their only way of playing. This is especially true for arrangements deemed as "technical," such as their arrangement of the Snarky Puppy tune "Lingus (We Like It Here)" (2014).<sup>247</sup>

Alcorn State University alumnus and band director Chesteron Frye maintains that cranking isn't bad, if executed correctly. Again, the criteria for correctness is in dispute, depending on who is directing the band, and who is listening.

Nasty crankin'. That's like overblowing. Not using the range of the instrument. A baritone shouldn't be trying to sound like a French horn. French horn shouldn't be trying to sound like trumpets when you crankin'. Crankin' is only fillin' up the horn. Pushing air through the horn. Fast air. That's all it is. Some people take it out of context. Some people think, "I gotta make my trumpet sound like a piccolo." A lot of band directors do not like crankin'. Everybody just thought it was nasty. Until they start hearing more people crank and sound good crankin', and to redefine the definition of crankin'. That was a bad term at first, when I was coming up where I was. But basically it's filling up the horn using the practical range of the instrument.<sup>248</sup>

Two aspects of execution are in dispute here, in regards to how cranking is defined: playing outside of the practical range of the instrument and overblowing. Cranking from an arranging standpoint can signify when players elect to perform arrangements that are either written in the upper range of their instruments purposely, or they alter what's written by "taking things up," and playing their part one octave higher than written. Frye informed that "some songs are wrote to be cranked," and their impact is assessed on if they effectively "smack you in the face," or not.<sup>249</sup> For example, he would write notes three ledger lines above the staff (if in

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<sup>247</sup> The use of the term "technical" can mean many things as well. If there are many sixteenth note runs, key changes, or melodies that move between instrumental groupings, a piece can be marked as technical. Increasingly however, the term is being applied to pieces that are not Hip-Hop- or rap-oriented, regardless of their difficulty level.

<sup>248</sup> Chesteron Frye, interview with the author, February 2022.

<sup>249</sup> Ibid.

concert pitch) for the mellophones, where normally, the parts would be written lower, in order to showcase the optimal range of the horn. These high sounding pitches for the brass instruments has received the nonmenclature of “super,” and represent a form of status for players that can hit the notes consistently.

This was demonstrated effectively by the 2022 edition of the Georgia Mass Band (GAMB) when the tubas played in the extreme upper range of the instrument, like in the beginning of “Learn From Boosie” (2021) or by the use of dyads, another technique used in tunes written for cranking, as heard in “GTA Lifestyle” (2020).<sup>250</sup> It is not always about rejecting a particular practice, as I heard the effectiveness of this implementation, and resistance towards its overuse during rehearsal. Trenton Hunter asserts, “Myself as a tuba player, I know where a tuba’s supposed to be at, or like the natural tessitura. I always compare... We’ve all seen in basic health class when they talk about the food pyramid. And what’s at the very top, where you have the sugars and sweets. And what does it always say, ‘use sparingly.’ And I feel like that’s how a lot of things in band is supposed to be.”

Other Arrangers, like Lindsey Sarjeant at Florida A&M is unlike Frye and Hunter. He doesn’t believe in writing arrangements for cranking or prefer the sounds bands attempt to make when playing tunes written in that fashion.

The problems that I have in listening to a lot of bands is that they use their [mellophones] as trumpets, and they overblow to the point the sound is so [blatantly] out of tune that it destroys the sound of the arrangement. So I try not to build that into my arrangement... I write for the characteristics of the instrument. Some people say that, “you don’t write the trumpets high enough.” I don’t write the trumpets up in the altissimo register. Well the truth is...everybody can’t play those E’s and F’s and G’s in the trumpet section. So why write up there when you

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<sup>250</sup> Observations from rehearsals in June 2022 and close media analysis; Killa Kev Productions, “Georgia Mass Band (GAMB) - GTA Lifestyle - 2022,” video, 03:54, YouTube, June 11, 2022, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FNjLwWhsC5A>; A1Media, “GAMB - Learn From Boosie | Battle of the Gulf Coast 2022 | Watch in 4K!!!!,” video, 03:03, YouTube, July 3, 2022, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5PDQBucEWFc>.

know it's not gonna sound good?...You just imagine what it's like intonation wise. And that messes up the tone quality. Then, you have the overtone series that's being messed up. Because when all of your arrangements sits here [*motions hands in the middle of his chest*], and you got this trumpet player way up there [*raises hand above his head*], it doesn't sit very well in what I like as an arranger. Some guys like that, and that's their prerogative to like that. Some bands play like that and they love it. The fans love, and that's them.<sup>251</sup>

When referring to overblowing, there is an assumption that adjustments are not made in order to accommodate the amount of air needed when cranking. Jaylon Taylor, a music educator, and Kendrick Williams, a student, are both at Central High School in Memphis, and think very deeply about music in general. While one is an Assistant Director and graduate of JSU, the other is set to start attending JSU in Fall of 2023. The two have specific thoughts on this aspect of cranking. J. Taylor says, "When you crank-up, you're blowing way more air than you usually do. Your neck is expanding more than it is, so your notes are going flat. I learned at Jackson State with Mr. Hollinger, tune the baritones a [hair sharp] because once they crank-up, they go flat."

Meanwhile, Williams excels at flute and snare drum. He is also a budding composer and arranger, and sees himself as a band director in the future. His contemplation of pedagogy is beyond his years, as is revealed in this exchange:

Kendrick Williams: I describe crankin' as it own thing, because... you gotta work to get there. You can't play how you usually play for concert. You gotta blow more. The way in which you play is different, especially if you talking about woodwind type of crankin.' [It's] kind of overblowing.

Kevin Green: Wouldn't that be described as bad? You're not supposed to do that.

Williams: If you know how to do it. We get people that come in here and we try to teach it. It don't sound as good when you first teach it. If you overblow a [B-flat] on piccolo, clarinet, and flute, it raises it up a tad bit, pitch wise... It raises it a tad bit more so that it projects more.

Green: Do you think that people that don't crank would say that sounds out of tune?

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<sup>251</sup> Advocates For Music and Music Education Association, "AMMEA's In The Hot Seat 'Round 2' with FAMU's Chief Arranger Lindsey Sarjeant," *In The Hot Seat*, video, 54:19, YouTube, July 28, 2020, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Q8VeCSNcBSg>.

Williams: If you do too much, you're out of tune.<sup>252</sup>

Some fair criticisms of cranking, due to technique, overuse, and generational preference, can be applied, though. Kelvin Washington was a member of the Southern University Marching Band, beginning the same year as Branford Marsalis and Big Chief Donald Harrison. He went on to have an illustrious career that concluded as Director of Bands at Howard University, in charge of the wind ensemble and the Howard Showtime Marching Band. He was able to offer critiques and state his own preference, while understanding the context of cranking with modern bands.

To me? It's like you and I are having a conversation, and you're yelling all the time... After so much of it, it becomes white noise. Cranking is about how much power [you can] generate. But then there comes a time where you become a better musician [and] ensemble if you can add some dynamics to this thing. When it comes to cranking, it takes little to no effort to play loud. Cranking is the art form to the newer generation. Guys my age and all, we kind of cringe at it, because, you know we were taught to listen to colors...the beauty side of the band. I was taught to have the characteristics of the instrument. That's the way I was raised learning music... When you're cranking the students are unaware of the characteristic sound of the instrument. A lot of students today think that is the characteristic sound of the instrument... It's just a matter of air speed. Cranking is not based off [of] the overtone series. It's based on how fast you can put the air in that instrument, and the amount of speed you can put that through. So a lot of bands have that jagged sound to it...[But] some like to run and gun, some like to set it up [basketball reference]. That's choices... So when I listen to it I appreciate it. Do I question some things? Yes.<sup>253</sup>

My time reinserting myself into the Black bandworld came with moments of reflection. The barbershop is a place such ruminations occur with Black men. In Jackson, the topic of band is as easily introduced as NBA basketball because of the yard– neighborhood connection. My barber, Chris Kelker, played saxophone in JSU's band in the mid-2000s and continues to work as a guitarist in church. I told him about the sound I heard when I was sixteen that caused me to fall

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<sup>252</sup> Kendrick Williams, interview with author, April 21, 2023.

<sup>253</sup> Kelvin Washington, interview with author, April 6, 2023.

in love with the Boom, but we both agreed when he stated, “that band ain’t comin’ back.”<sup>254</sup> That warm, round, jazzy, funky sound has been replaced with something else that I also enjoy, but relies on a repertoire of Southern Hip-Hop that was not as prominent during my three years in the band in the 90s. This sound that incorporates cranking fits some tunes, Metro Boomin’s “Superhero” (2022), but not others, Portrait’s “Here We Go Again!” (1992) in my opinion.

My point of view is predicated on hearing the production style of the Portrait song, which combines the sampling of Sly and the Family Stone/Digital Underground drums, with interpolations of the Stevie Wonder–composed, Michael Jackson–performed “I Can’t Help It” (1979).<sup>255</sup> The construction and feel of the track is in the vein of the 1990s R&B that had begun to incorporate Hip-Hop production, but it still includes a bridge section, and remnants of classic R&B. Furthermore, I was in rehearsal when the Portrait song was first distributed to the band, by its arranger Lumark Gulley in 1992, and I remember our positive reaction as we sight-read it. As a protégé of Adams and knowing his musical philosophy as his friend and mentee, I know that hearing his arrangement altered so it’s more suitable for cranking is not something he would welcome.

When FAMU alumnus Maurice LeFlore and I discussed the history of our respective bands, both of us agreed that cranking was not a style of playing we did. I relayed to him that Mr. Adams, being the Chief Arranger at the time, would not allow that kind of a sound. This sentiment is also supported by Milburn, from her time being instructed by Mr. Adams at Norfolk. I offered the theory to LeFlore that the trap sound that dominates Hip-Hop and some pop music now, with its deep, melodic basslines, and dark and aggressive timbres, matches the sound of

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<sup>254</sup> Christopher Kelker, personal communication with author, May 5, 2023.

<sup>255</sup> *Whosampled*, “‘Here We Go Again!’– Portrait,” [https://www.whosampled.com/Portrait/Here-We-Go-Again!/.](https://www.whosampled.com/Portrait/Here-We-Go-Again!/)

bands' cranking. I expressed to him that it can be argued that it is a stylistically correct method for interpreting trap-inspired music. Maurice said he had not considered this argument, and agreed with my assertions, as did Milburn. Maurice still insists that "Hip-Hop is supposed to add on to the marching band tradition, but not take over."<sup>256</sup> Although Milburn, Maurice, and I have a kind of consensus about how cranking should be employed, similar to the rest of the Black bandworld, we still don't have one, criteria-based definition.

The implications for this working in the red, without agreed upon standards, have had some ill effects, not just in terms of playing, but culturally as well. This section has investigated definitions of cranking and when it became a widely used term, but even in disagreement, a person's Blackness or allegiance to Black band culture was not in question. Unfortunately, as the sonic identity of our youth has shifted away from exposure to woodwinds, brass, and percussion instruments in their everyday music consumption, a singular way of sounding, in relation to Blackness, has begun to be asserted by young students and bandheads.

### **Blackness, Whiteness, and the Blow That H\* Mentality**

Dr. Mark W. Phillips is both a graduate of Virginia State University and was Director of Bands for The Trojan Explosion, from 2003–2013.<sup>257</sup> During a panel discussion at the 2023 HBCU National Band Directors' Consortium Convention, he was asked about his philosophy for establishing a comprehensive band program on the university level. An incipient problem in the Black bandworld amongst educators is the considerable number of events marching bands are committing to during the Spring semester in lieu of focusing on wind band literature. These added responsibilities can be taxing to students, and do not allow them the individual practice

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<sup>256</sup> Maurice LeFlore, interview with author, March 8, 2021.

<sup>257</sup> Virginia State University, "History" [Trojan Explosion History], <https://www.vsu.edu/student-life/band/history.php>.

time needed that is usually unavailable in the Fall semester. Educators feel that musicianship isn't being developed properly. Formats known as concert band, symphonic band, or wind ensemble, have become increasingly racialized to some within this ecosystem. Some students, parents, and administrators have characterized these ensembles as "White," and outside the realm of relevance according to their musical taste, while non-Black music educators assume HBCU graduates are incapable of teaching and conducting these ensembles. All these notions are placed in opposition to the sound and ensemble that, to them is conclusively Black – a crankin' marching band.

Dr. Phillips admitted, "I was introduced to a term that I didn't know, and I still don't know, because I was told that the people I teach don't 'crank.'"<sup>258</sup> Even after his many years of service at Virginia State and his current dedication to students as the PVAMU Music Department head, his competency, as well as his Blackness are in question to some, because the ever-elusive "they" told him that groups under his tutelage "don't sound Black." The other panelists vehemently disapproved of this portrayal. High School music educator Kuan Mitchell counters with the fact that the Trojan Explosion was invited to the Honda Battle of the Bands ten years in a row, under his charge. Laporsha Dortch (Porsha), Silkette Flag Coordinator for the Spartan Legion becomes animated when saying, "They say our standards are too high on this show. We expect too much. We're bougie. The Legion gets that all the time. They're looking at everything we do as 'the culture.' What are we pushing? What are we selling? One thing we used to sell was versatility. We're told, we're not changing with the times. We're the problem."<sup>259</sup>

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<sup>258</sup> Julian Luke, Kuan Mitchell, and Laporsha Dortch, "Talk That Talk - Episode 73 Live from HBCU National Band Directors' Consortium" (panel discussion, HBCU National Band Directors' Consortium Convention, Georgia International Convention Center, College Park, GA, April 1, 2023).

<sup>259</sup> Ibid.

Interestingly, while many of my interlocutors did relate cranking to a way of interpreting Southern Hip-Hop, none of them equated the practice to a fixed definition of Blackness. The technique is not universally agreed upon in the discourse as the lone representation of Black identity in band, but it is prominent. It lives online in comment sections or in orally expressed comments amongst bandheads. Regardless of its multicultural origins, in the States, Hip-Hop itself has become shorthand for all things Black or “urban,” with Oprah Winfrey’s, or anyone else’s, lack of commitment to the genre putting their Blackness in doubt.<sup>260</sup> We live in a time in American history where variances of opinion are not safe from the backlash of fanboys, Stans, Hives, or Barbs.<sup>261</sup>

Cranking, unilaterally tethered to Blackness, is a reinterpretation of what Jennifer Stoever calls the “sonic color line,” or “the process of racializing sound – how and why certain bodies are expected to produce, desire, and live amongst particular sounds – and its product, the hierarchical division sounded between ‘[W]hiteness’ and ‘[B]lackness.’”<sup>262</sup> In this case, the act of cranking represents the “tones, musical rhythms, and expressed listening practices marked by [W]hites as ‘[B]lack’ and therefore of lesser value and potentially dangerous to [W]hiteness and the power structures upholding it.”<sup>263</sup> In efforts to claim space in the marching arts, which as an activity is still racialized as aesthetically White in the American imagination, cranking produces sounds that bandheads use to proclaim Blackness. Many of them feel that if “they” (White

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<sup>260</sup> Preezy Brown, “A History of Oprah Winfrey’s Hot-and-Cold Relationship with Hip-Hop,” XXL [online], August 10, 2018, <https://www.xxlmag.com/history-oprah-winfreys-hot-cold-relationship-hip-hop/>; Todd Boyd, “Oprah Hip-Hop and Issues of Black Identity,” *News and Notes* [multimedia], July 5, 2006, <https://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=5534557>.

<sup>261</sup> These are fan bases that usually get belligerent if you critique the person they like. “Fanboy” is general, “Stan” is associated with Eminem, “Hive” is short for BeyHive and is associated with Beyoncé, and “Barb” is associated with Nicki Minaj.

<sup>262</sup> Jennifer Lynn Stoever, *The Sonic Color Line: Race and the Cultural Politics of Listening* (New York: New York University Press, 2016), 7.

<sup>263</sup> *Ibid.*, 31.

folks’) don’t like it, it doesn’t matter, because cranking is “our” (Black folks’) cultural expression, and should be interpreted as a type of push-back against those power structures (adjudicated marching band competitions) that attempt to restrict what our musical gestures should or shouldn’t be. Yet, this is a point of contention, not agreement, with the arguments made verbally or with instruments.

Arizona State University Assistant Professor of Music Joyce M. McCall thought about such matters of Blackness and Whiteness, in band, as a high school student. When she and the few African-American peers in her program asked their band director the reasons they never competed against predominately Black band programs, she trusted their responses of “‘Well, their band programs aren’t very good’ or ‘They didn’t have very good teachers.’”<sup>264</sup> She later found that “predominantly Black bands in my area did participate in competitions, but they were always competitions that only Black bands and Black people attended.”<sup>265</sup> It was hard for her to contemplate what the biases were against these programs.

Texas Southern Ocean of Soul member Samserai Cardenas confirmed this situation when describing her high school band of diverse students in Port Arthur, Texas. In her experience, show-style bands would compete in Battle of the Band events, like the Royal High School Battle of the Bands, in Brookshire, Texas, or others out of state. These contests would include a field show, and sometimes a stand battle. These events were adjudicated by HBCU band directors, or retired show-style band directors.<sup>266</sup> A primary difference is that the show-style–centric competitions occurred outside of the official University Interscholastic League (UIL) governing

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<sup>264</sup> Joyce M. McCall, “Speak No Evil: Talking Race as an African American in Music Education,” in *Marginalized Voices in Music Education*, ed. Brent Talbot (New York: Routledge, 2018), 17.

<sup>265</sup> Ibid.

<sup>266</sup> Samserai Cardenas, interview with the author, April 30, 2023. She identified Mr. [Dr.] Kedric Taylor from Southern University as a judge.

body, which does not have a category for show-style bands. Moreover, there is an added financial burden placed on the Texas-based programs because of a need to fundraise and solicit donations. Unfortunately, even when these contests are held in the state of Texas, school funds can not be used for non-UIL supported events.<sup>267</sup>

The UIL organization sets rules and policies for high school athletics, music, and other adjudicated occurrences that music educator Dr. Darryl Singleton felt moved to write about in his dissertation work. He is comfortable teaching several styles of band, and became aware of the disconnect judges have with show-style groups after attending conferences. He discovered that there was a level of non-engagement with the show-style aspect of band presentation by the Texas Music Adjudicators Association. When he asked why facets of show-style execution were not covered in adjudicator training, he wasn't given any coherent reasoning for its omission.<sup>268</sup> Singleton reminds us that under the original name, the University of Texas Interscholastic League (UTIL), activities were segregated, that the racial indicator of "White" was not removed from documents until 1965, and that Black students and educators didn't merge with UIL, from the Prairie View Interscholastic League, until 1970.<sup>269</sup> He kept this history in mind when discussing the mindset present in the adjudication workshops:

I have seen and heard first-hand the reinforcement of corps-style aesthetics with the, to my view, somewhat contradictory reminder that "there is no UIL style"; that is, a preferred marching style or set of performance parameters for UIL contests. However, University Interscholastic League rubrics make reference to "characteristic tone quality," "desirable and appropriate sonority of music." On the surface, these may be perceived as reasonable and easily agreed upon norms. I would argue that in practice, they are not so easily agreed upon.<sup>270</sup>

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<sup>267</sup> Mary Meaux, "MHS Marching Heat Ruling The South As Show Band," *The News* [online], November 10, 2016, <https://www.panews.com/2016/11/10/mhs-marching-heat-ruling-the-south-as-show-band/>.

<sup>268</sup> Darryl Marc Singleton, "Black Band for Brown Students: A Culturally Relevant Pedagogy," (DMA diss., Boston University, 2020), 6.

<sup>269</sup> *Ibid.*, 144–145.

<sup>270</sup> *Ibid.*, 26.

Bandheads in Houston feel there is a concerted effort to eliminate show-style programs, even when they've proven successful.<sup>271</sup> While a 2008 post on bandhead.org suggests that a contest in Houston would not penalize show-style groups because of their marching style, i.e., the exact reasoning adjudicators give for not having a show-style category, there aren't any references made to the way the bands should sound.<sup>272</sup>

According to Samsurai, adjustments in the playing approach of her high school band had to be made in order for them to score well in the area designated for intonation, balance, and blend on the adjudication sheet.<sup>273</sup> Since the UIL functions are deemed the official competitions for the state of Texas, ratings received in these events impact the perceived strength of the program, and the professional status of the band director. What is thought of as “good” or “bad” is not concretely defined upon racial lines, especially when UIL promotes their non-discrimination policy, but judgments are still made based upon biases that Samsurai felt as a teenager. Regardless of how the policy reads, she and her bandmates didn't care: choosing to crank wasn't their only way of playing, but they chose not to omit it either. She made sure to impress upon me that they were still able to get two “Superior” and one “Excellent” rating at UIL events.<sup>274</sup>

Positive and negative positioning gestures are discussed in the text *Bad Music: The Music We Love to Hate*. Scholars Washburne and Derno explain that the labeling of sounds as good or

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<sup>271</sup> Show Style Talk, “Show Style Talk - Band Podcast (5-10-23) ‘Band News/Battle Recaps,’” video, 20:21, YouTube, May 10, 2023, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HORDRsQH2Io>.

<sup>272</sup> Darryl Marc Singleton, 5-6; Goldy\_1914, “Houston ISD Marching Band Festival 10-25-08,” Events, Bandhead.org, <https://bandhead.org/event/houston-isd-marching-band-festival-10-25-08>.

<sup>273</sup> University Interscholastic League Region Marching Band Contest Adjudication Sheet, [https://www.uil-texas.org/files/music/Region\\_Marching\\_Adjudication\\_Sheets.pdf](https://www.uil-texas.org/files/music/Region_Marching_Adjudication_Sheets.pdf).

<sup>274</sup> Cardenas, interview with author.

bad, “serves to construct or reimagine specific modes of subjectivity or to restructure social relationships by asserting deliberate musical agency. The very act of passing an aesthetic judgment assumes and bestows authority upon the judge.”<sup>275</sup> Professor Joyce M. McCall’s teachers saw themselves as authority figures. They made decisions to deride Black bands, without always hearing them, because they saw their perspective as the “correct” way of doing things. They “claim to be ‘in the know’ and demonstrate an educated perspective and activate a wide range of underlying assumptions about what is ‘good.’”<sup>276</sup>

Evan Garner, who is an Albany State music education student and Georgia Mass Band member, is an insider, refuting claims of cranking’s a lack of musicality. He declares to crank properly that “it’s different types of studies that you have to do,” and “breathing techniques that I have to learn differently than normal.”<sup>277</sup> There are standard techniques in play, but altered, so that the band can get a certain amount of clarity and volume when cranking. He spoke of “knowing where to breathe,” and the execution of staggered breathing techniques by different sections, which allowed members to phrase the music properly.<sup>278</sup> Washburne and Derno mention the “cultural and historical contestations over what is thought to be good and bad within a variety of differing contexts.”<sup>279</sup> In the context of the marching arts, African-American musicians combine standard and non-standard methodology for the purposes of pleasing themselves and the Black audiences they perform for. Although Garner, too, keeps the audience in mind, he still doesn’t think cranking is the only way bands should relate to African-American listeners.

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<sup>275</sup> Christopher Washburne and Maiken Derno, introduction to *Bad Music: The Music We Love to Hate*, eds. Christopher Washburne and Maiken Derno (New York: Routledge, 2014), 3.

<sup>276</sup> Ibid.

<sup>277</sup> Evan Garner, interview with author, October 2, 2022.

<sup>278</sup> Ibid.

<sup>279</sup> Washburne and Derno, 5.

George H. Lewis sees musical preference as a “culture signal...a framework of beliefs, expressive symbols, and values with which people define their worlds, express their feelings, and make their judgments.”<sup>280</sup> These predilections have always guided musical choices in African-American music-making. There is an inherent “wrongness” that relates to working in the red, which is embraced and employed during the creative process. The producer Zaytoven (Xavier Dotson) whose Hip-Hop production style has been orchestrated and cranked by bands, shared that his brand of trap was based on foregrounding practices that were not standardized.

When I started doin’ music with Gucci [Mane], it was the birth of a certain sound of trap music. It’s me makin’ the beat in five minutes. The bass might be too loud, you barely can hear the clap, the piano’s too low. Gucci’s sayin’ stuff that you can’t hardly understand [and] he off tempo. [It] added a certain street to it, a certain trap to it. It sound rough... [Gucci] is definitely one of the first guys to bring imperfection into trap music.<sup>281</sup>

If cranking leads to sounds for bands that are off-kilter, non-symphonic, and coarse, then the skill becomes knowing when to use this aesthetic and how to execute it, thus avoiding the blanket labeling of show-style bands as playing “wrong” all of the time. Kendrick Williams was very poignant with his specifications of when he felt cranking was necessary. What’s interesting here is that his background of beat making and composition with digital audio workstations contributed to his analysis. His mindset and study of producers Tay Keith and 808 Mafia is partnered with his understanding of band instruments, all of which he uses in determining the methodology behind the performance practice.

Not every song should be cranked. Rule of thumb that I go by, if you have a beat, and the 808 is just constantly hittin’, you know it’s gonna be a crankin’ type song. But if you have more of a love R&B type song – it’s real laid back, but the lyricist is doin’ their own thing. It’s not so much about the beat. The lyricist is singing.

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<sup>280</sup> George H. Lewis, “Who Do You Love?: The Dimensions of Musical Taste,” in *Popular Music and Communication*, 2nd edition, ed. James Lull (Newbury Park: Sage 1992), 135.

<sup>281</sup> Red Bull Music, “Why Zaytoven’s Legacy Will Live Forever | Documentary | Red Bull Music,” *The Note: Zaytoven*, video, 07:21, YouTube, April 20, 2018, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5NpmuZYcotQ>.

That's how you know, for me at least. If a lot goin' on in the beat, it's probably a crankin' song.<sup>282</sup>

Ricardo Brown is the current Associate Director of Athletic Bands at the University of Connecticut (UConn), and instructor for the Mandarins Drum and Bugle Corps. He, like myself, has experience in show-style bands and drum corps, but he is more deeply involved than I was. He has taught multiple HBCU or DCI groups, and continues to be abreast of many different ensembles as both clinician and adjudicator. In short, his words carry weight. He recognizes that show-style bands can play with a full sound that does not lend itself to cranking, but that the Black make-up of these groups automatically associates them with the practice to some in the mainstream bandworld. He addressed this in a panel discussion, hosted by Aaron Noe of [windconductor.org](http://windconductor.org).

Minor High School in Alabama is one of the best show-style high schools I've ever seen. Let's be real y'all...The reason why our bands are judged differently is because they don't understand the sound. It's not accepted in what's considered to be characteristic sound. Go listen to Minor High School. They giving you the show-style, but then they give you this beautiful tone quality, and this approach to band that can be acceptable anywhere. But those bands don't get credit. Why?...There are numerous bands around the country that play this way. Bethune-Cookman plays with characteristic sound, but [they] rarely get looked at when it comes to upper echelon bands.<sup>283</sup>

Balance should be the applied metaphor, even if working in the red, because things have gotten to a point where, as Professor Kelvin Washington has noted, the only sound some students associate with their instrument is produced by cranking. In my own thoughts and experience, many high school or collegiate students in show-style bands, of this generation, do not listen to music that has subtlety or dynamic contrast, therefore they don't relate those sounds to their

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<sup>282</sup> Williams, interview with author.

<sup>283</sup> Wind Conductor, "Opening a Dialog in Band about Racism, Racial Tension, and Our Society," video, 38:34, YouTube, June 22, 2020, [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AGe6\\_JUmmXE](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AGe6_JUmmXE).

instruments. They were not able to use “The President’s Own” United States Marine Corps Band as a professional model, because they were not exposed to this ensemble, as I was in secondary school. Bands that try to find that metaphorical balance, as described by Professor Brown, are sometimes disregarded by everyone due to having a variety of sounds within their style – or what can be understood as a different manner of working in the red. In racial terms, these bands are considered too Black for some, but not Black enough for others.

Kendrick Williams provided nuance when I asked him about the racialization of cranking and the coded terms, like “boring,” used for bands that don’t crank. His thoughts, again, showed wisdom beyond his years.

I’ve heard it, but I don’t believe it. Music is music, no matter what race you [are]. This is one of the things that’s actually plaguing middle schools and high schools right now. You don’t have to have a crankin’ band. Crankin’ is good. But never sacrifice crankin’ and being loud over the fundamentals, articulating together and playing together. We’d rather have you articulating together and playing together than being loud and sloppy. When they’re like “a band is not crankin’, oh they’re boring.” But what are they doing right? They probably articulating, breathing together, playing together, way better than that band that’s over there just loud.<sup>284</sup>

The “blow that h\* mentality” is a phrase I first heard from Porsha (Laporsha Dortch). The Spartan Legion staff member, and the other *Talk That Talk* panelists used the expression to describe individuals and bands that embrace a type of cranking that they think doesn’t keep tone and clarity in mind. It is framed as a way of doing things that allows musicians to play as loud as possible, at all times, regardless of where the melody lies within the sections of the band, or the style of music that’s being played. Not everyone who embraces this mentality, and the sounding that occurs as a result, links this directly to Blackness, but many bandheads absolutely make that

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<sup>284</sup> Williams, interview with author.

determination. Bands in the SWAC and the summer bands are accused of adopting this as a motto more than others.

High School band alumnus, media stalwart, and promoter Justin Patterson is deeply embedded in, highly appreciative of, and extremely knowledgeable about all types of expression in the Black bandworld. This includes speaking on behalf of high school students that he has encountered, who want to be in summer band to let loose, and just blow that h\*.<sup>285</sup> The alumni or adult version of summer bands that started in the mid-2000s are especially susceptible to this description.

Summer band membership consists of high school, collegiate students, and adults who are no longer in college, with varying degrees of instruction that assists developing players. Staff members defend the pedagogical practices of their respective organizations, but these recreational groups have varying numbers of adults in their membership whose rehearsal attendance and etiquette is not as easily controlled as those of high school students. The ensembles get into concert formation on the field or assemble in stadium stands in order to play tunes, with a membership that has a great amount of person-to-person inconsistency in practice commitment. At best, high school students gain valuable experience playing next to more experienced players, but at worst, they pick up undesirable tendencies from adults who are not always disciplined during rehearsal. Justin stresses that at least fundamentally, being a good reader is necessary due to the large amount of music that needs to be memorized quickly.<sup>286</sup> Many bands in recent years have been relying on Hip-Hop tunes that they like to crank, which caters to what community members like to hear.

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<sup>285</sup> Passion Is..., "Talk That Talk - Episode 41 We're Talkin' Mass Band," video, 36:09, YouTube, June 1, 2022, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CYIsFbi3HZM>.

<sup>286</sup> Ibid., 39:12.

During episode 41 of *Talk That Talk*, issues surrounding summer bands/mass bands was the topic for the day. An exchange became spirited between Justin, Porsha, and a panelist I didn't recognize named Derik. Porsha was curious about a newly forming mass band in Virginia that Derik wanted to start, and what the playing approach was going to be. Regional and conference differences were cited and exacerbated in Porsha's questioning and warning, "I just wanna know if it's gonna have that 'blow that h\*' mentality, because you'll be the one to get cussed out...If these high school kids...start soundin' like the SWAC, all that [sh *censors herself*] that go on down there, some of it good, some of it bad. When they show up and William Beathia cussin' you out, I'mma jus say, 'blame the all-star band.'"<sup>287</sup> Comments by ANewCee support Porsha's argument. "The VA Mass Band gonna try to sound SWAC...ish LOL...LOUD with no intonation...The SWAC is gonna Blow That [H\*] PERIOD. Can't nobody play louder than the SWAC. But that's not gonna fly in Virginia."<sup>288</sup>

Testimony from Claire Milburn did not support a negative view of cranking or its links to Blackness per se, but she did see and understand regional and conference differences in style that some people would misunderstand. When speaking about her time in the Spartan Legion, she said, "It's a different style of playing on the East Coast. But a lot of the students, especially if they play baritone and mellophone, would listen to SWAC bands and get that sound in their ear, and get a little out-of-the-box, and get punished for that."<sup>289</sup> When I asked what she meant by "out-of-the-box," she plainly stated, "Crankin.' Playing too out-of-character for the Norfolk

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<sup>287</sup> Ibid., 55:55.

<sup>288</sup> Comments on "Talk That Talk - Episode 41 We're Talkin' Mass Band," <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CYIsFbi3HZM>.

<sup>289</sup> Claire Milburn, interview with author, August 2, 2020.

sound.”<sup>290</sup> It is this wholehearted rejection of cranking and anti-SWAC sentiments that bandheads interpret as regional and racial bias.

The gender of the instrumentalist can also be deemed a factor in sound production. St. Mary’s Academy, the all-girl Catholic school in New Orleans, produces skilled musicians who I have marched with at JSU. I never thought of them as inadequate, and one former bandmate of mine, Dionne Harrison, tours as a trombonist for a brass band that started at the school – the Original Pinettes Brass Band. St. Mary’s marching band gets slighted in New Orleans for a balanced approach to playing, but is also excused for doing so in the eyes of many musicians because of the all-female membership of the group. Ray Johnson, former director of the band, explained in an interview the social position his students found themselves in because of their sound.

Well, looking at the sound of marching band nowadays, and of course particularly the styles that we have down here in Louisiana and New Orleans, most of them try to play like the colleges if they have the makeup and the personality for that, which is the loud sound type of thing like that. The sonic style that we have of course the benefit of that is, we have an advantage because by the band being all females, I’m not saying that they’re not capable but they don’t overblow, they don’t play loud, out of tune and static and stuff like that only because they’re not trying to do that.<sup>291</sup>

Porsha has stated that the standards in sound that she and others uphold are deemed outdated and bougie. In a *Time* magazine review of the book *Bougie Like Me*, Jack White explains that “in Black slang, being ‘bougie,’ derived from bourgeois, means being socially pretentious.”<sup>292</sup> This term crossed over into mainstream America from the popularity of the song

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<sup>290</sup> Ibid.

<sup>291</sup> Olivia Broslawsky, “Marching Forth, A Study of the Impact of Gender on the Professionalization of Marching Band Students in New Orleans” (master’s thesis, Tulane University, 2017), 77–78.

<sup>292</sup> Jack White, “Bougie Like Me,” *Time Magazine* 153, no. 10 (March 15, 1999): 90, <https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=mih&AN=1606804&site=ehost-live>.

“Bad and Boojee” (2016), and the creative Donald Glover’s citing of it when receiving a Golden Globe Award. It has a long history in the Black community, and is associated negatively with discriminatory thoughts and actions based on class distinctions (rich/poor), colorism (light/brown/dark complexion), hair-type (“good” = straight/ “bad” = kinky or nappy), and language usage (King’s English/vernacular English and slang).<sup>293</sup> Bands that have a sense of grandiloquence can be off-putting, and these internal struggles amongst African Americans have legislated the musical taste by HBCU music departments as well. I don’t need to rehash how departments related the study of Western Art music to respectability politics and racial uplift, which is covered in the literature review, however it is this history that feeds into a perceived bougieness that bandheads feel contributes to the maligning of cranking.

Some who enjoy cranking label those that don’t as trying to be bougie, or as trying to disassociate themselves from their Blackness, while those who don’t want to engage claim that ethnicity and sound are not related. Both are untrue. Working in the red, loudness, playing outside the practical range of the instrument, relying on heavy low-end frequencies, or any other interventionist musical practice are all methodologies that bands can and do embrace, but they don’t need to do so to be effective. Cranking should be associated with Southern Hip-Hop, which shares its sonic tendencies, but neither should be thought of as some type of shorthand for Black identity. In the next section, I attempt to provide more nuance when discussing the HBCU band that sparks the most debate with this issue – the Florida A&M Marching 100.

### **Legislated Blackness: Perception, Reality, and The Florida A&M Marching 100**

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<sup>293</sup> John L. Jackson Jr., *Harlemworld: Doing Race and Class in Contemporary Black America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010), 134; David West Brown, 2006 “Girls and Guys, Ghetto and Bougie: Metapragmatics, Ideology and the Management of Social Identities.” *Journal of Sociolinguistics* 10 (5) 2006: 597, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-9841.2006.00297.x>; Lawrence Graham, *Our Kind of People: Inside America’s Black Upper Class*, 1st edition (New York: Harper Collins, 1999), 2. The video for The Migos song has over a billion views.

Fabian Holt's work in genre studies can be applied here, although instead of repertoire, I am referencing style of play and performance practice. I link Holt's idea of localized conceptions expressed in a genre culture to sounding, rather than song selection, because I look to champion a multifaceted conception of Blackness rather than a singular one.<sup>294</sup> Earth, Wind, and Fire feature a vastly different sound than Parliament/Funkadelic, but both groups are considered quintessential representations of Black music. There can be differences in shared values without one's Blackness being legislated, which is the modus operandi of some bandheads who don't enjoy FAMU's brand of expression, which they wouldn't classify as working in the red.

I enter this section cautiously, so as not to negatively characterize any program. I came away from my time doing fieldwork at FAMU extremely impressed with their seriousness during rehearsal and the overall sound of the band. That said, as a researcher, I must present various opinions about their sound identity, regardless of what my own beliefs are, because these thoughts and ideas are in the discourse within the Black bandworld. I explore sentiments that go beyond stated preferences for or against FAMU's sound, and into what their presentation means to people. I use "people" as a general term here, which includes non-Black listeners who generally don't pay attention to show-style bands. Acceptance by White audiences can sometimes cause backlash for any Black artist because of supposed concessions perceived to have been made to curry favor. Group awards earned by FAMU's band, and individual accolades obtained by esteemed music educator Dr. William Patrick Foster, have not quelled those accusations. Furthermore, when fans or alumni of FAMU use markers of this acceptance, like winning the Sudler Trophy for collegiate bands, as proof of the Marching 100's superiority over other HBCU ensembles, without questioning whether bias against other Black bands has been a

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<sup>294</sup> Fabian Holt, *Genre in Popular Music* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007), 19.

factor in their inability to win the award, bandheads, rightly or wrongly, use this as fuel for assertions that they are “boring.”<sup>295</sup> Yet, during the course of this research, I have learned that members and fans of this band are not concerned with what bandheads think or feel. If FAMU has developed their own brand of band, or specific concepts unique to them, as Holt would attach to genre cultures, then this simply demonstrates that FAMU has universal appeal. PWI band aficionados, or other so-called links to Whiteness, are joined by rappers who choose their sound above others’, Prince, who FAMU performed with during the 2007 Super Bowl XLI Halftime Show, and music industry impresarios who hire FAMU marching musicians for professional engagements. They are all drawn to the style of the Florida A&M Marching 100.

It is perhaps this type of fortitude, modeled by Dr. Foster, of carving your own path and creating your own sound, that has influenced collegiate bands in general, and that students who were under his charge have drawn from. In regards to a philosophy of ensemble balance and blend, in 1968, Dr. Foster himself wrote, “the band should sound like an organ registration. Do not overblow by playing too loudly.”<sup>296</sup> He was also committed to having a band that appealed to Black audiences.<sup>297</sup> Foster has made statements addressing the low number of African-American students participating in band at PWIs: “At major football universities, it is true that the racial composition doesn’t match the ethnic enrollment of their football teams and the universities themselves. The style of marching, selection of music, format, type of maneuvers and show design is not relevant to the heritage and lifestyle of Black people.”<sup>298</sup> Although it can also be argued that this is changing because HBCU music department graduates are being hired as band

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<sup>295</sup> The John Philip Sousa Foundation, “The Sudler Trophy,” [https://sousafoundation.net/sub\\_menu\\_items/1](https://sousafoundation.net/sub_menu_items/1).

<sup>296</sup> William P. Foster, *Band Pageantry: A Guide for the Marching Band* (Minnesota: Hal Leonard, 1968), 92.

<sup>297</sup> Nicolas Brandon Thomas, “William Patrick Foster: Dean of African American Bandmasters” (PhD diss., University of Georgia, 2013), 149.

<sup>298</sup> Laurie Dunivant Sneiderman “Marching to Different Drummers,” *Black Issues in Higher Education* 17, no. 5 (April 27, 2000): 28, <https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=a9h&AN=3075821&site=ehost-live>.

directors at several PWIs, the connection between these bands and the general African-American populace is negligible.

Dr. Jorim Reid was extremely forthcoming with regards to issues of race, band, and sonic identity in his dissertation. The FAMU graduate had to first deal with detractors thinking he was going to transform the North Carolina Central University Sound Machine Marching Band into a smaller version of the Marching 100 after becoming band director at the institution – i.e., a “White” sounding band.

I was well aware of HBCU band culture and how FAMU was perceived (by some) as this soft and pretty “White,” “European” sounding band (as some described) as compared to the “Black” sounding bands that played loud and abrasive... We were taught the basic concepts of sound production, tone quality, and intonation at FAMU, and this balance was leveled across all ensembles and not just the symphonic bands. This idea of musicianship was not some “European” concept, as some argued. Through our lens at FAMU, we were Black, an HBCU, and most of the music we played was from Black artists, and we played well-crafted arrangements of these songs in tune, in time, with good tone, in balance, and at various dynamics, articulations, and expressions. I could not grasp how or why playing in tune or with good tone was considered “White” or, conversely, why playing loud was thought of as playing incorrectly out of character.<sup>299</sup>

The idea of loudness or being loud has a history between Black and White America, as stated by Rose, and is the foundation of her “working in the red” concept.<sup>300</sup> As any resident of a gentrifying neighborhood will tell you, being averse to or suspicious of loudness is tied to Black spaces in very real ways. What seems to have occurred with FAMU is that their ensemble philosophy for achieving what alumna, composer, and arranger Marie A. Douglas refers to as “maximum sound” isn’t as identifiably Black to bandheads who describe FAMU’s sound as

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<sup>299</sup> Jorim Edgar Reid Sr., “Marching Sound Machines: An Autoethnography of a Director of Bands at an Historically Black College and University” (DMA diss., Boston University, 2020), 187–188.

<sup>300</sup> Rose, 62.

“soft” or “White.” Her statements explain the sonic identity of FAMU, MEAC bands, and SWAC bands in the context of a multifaceted, multidimensional Black existence in sound.

I think that every HBCU-style band plays for maximum sound. I remember gettin’ a handbook goin’ to FAMU my freshman year...and it says, “We play for maximum sound.” Period. And a lot of people don’t think that that’s the case, but we do. Now, bein’ Black is not a monolith. There’s gonna be a bunch of different definitions and perceptions of what crankin’ or playing for maximum sound is. Some people utilize the overtone series to play for maximum sound. Some people will utilize extreme uniformity to play for maximum sound...So between the overtone series and using exceptional uniformity, and extreme intonation to play for maximum sound. Scientifically, that’s the route that FAMU takes, and you’ll hear a lot of MEAC bands imitate that philosophy...And then you’ll get on the SWAC side of things, and maximum sound is attempted or cranking is attempted via extreme register. And so that’s just the two different philosophies I believe that there are. Some people are going to use exceptional uniformity, unison, harmonic series and science, in that way to achieve a maximum sound. The loudest possible, the most dynamic, the most colorful possible sound is the MEAC thought process. And then you get to SWAC, and it’s very much like the second line band, Mardi Gras environment. And it just trickled up the mid-South...It calls for a different kind of method. I don’t think either one is incorrect.<sup>301</sup>

Media stalwart Justin Patterson is a New Orleans native and enjoys cranking. He relates to Marie’s words with his preferential leanings toward one type of sound over another, and like Marie, has an appreciation and respect for various sonic identities. In his recollection of seeing marching bands as a boy, he remembers initially being a fan of the Marching 100, because of their membership being over three hundred people, but his allegiance shifted to Southern because of the very difference in sound that Marie described. He too didn’t see either philosophy as somehow being deficient in Blackness, or somehow “more” Black than the other.

The New Orleans culture [got me into band]. Growing up watchin’ New Orleans bands...every time you see it, it’s just a big band. I’m a fan of bands with big numbers. Growing up, I loved watchin’ FAMU marching band. But the only thing that veered me away from FAMU was, in New Orleans, we crank. FAMU, everything sounds beautiful and pretty. So I used to always wonder as a kid, why they don’t sound like we sound? And that’s when my love for Southern

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<sup>301</sup> Marie A. Douglas, interview with author, March 24, 2021.

University came. Southern brought it every time...In New Orleans, the band, they more popular than every sport in the school, you know? It's no choice but to be a bandhead coming from New Orleans.<sup>302</sup>

It was the localized culture of cranking that influenced Justin's taste.

Opinions about certain bands are easy to find because of social media. Justin makes his living from streaming, recording, and posting band content, which always has a chat area where thoughts can be shared by viewers. *Show Style Talk*, as alluded to in Chapter 1, is constantly consuming and creating band media content, with reviewing battles being a large part of the program.<sup>303</sup> The show and its panelists have become popular amongst bandheads. Viewers tune into the live stream in order to hear the lively exchanges between the hosts and to express their own opinions in the chat.

Despite the hosts trying to be impartial and appreciative of FAMU during a review of their 5th Quarter stand battle with Alabama State, it was clear they were not enthralled with either band that particular evening. The comments in the chat were not so kind when viewers listened to FAMU's rendition of Michael Jackson's "Leave Me Alone" (1989). Statements questioning the band's Blackness were plentiful.

Tee-Jay I Will SETTE You Straight: See what I mean? It sounds like if they dragged John Sousa from his grave and made him arrange this.

Brian Caldwell: this leave me alone is from the white Michael.

MELPCSR Jr.: why is this Michael Jackson sounding like Alan Jackson

LaShonda S.: FAMU is going to FAMU

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<sup>302</sup> BAND HEAD Network, "Hanging with BANDHEADs featuring SMASHTIME," video, 21:05, YouTube, September 9, 2020, <https://www.facebook.com/BandHeadNetwork/videos/hanging-with-bandheads-featuring-smashtime/327718331884039/>.

<sup>303</sup> The significance and history of battling will be discussed in Chapter 3. The Zero Quarter and 5th Quarter are the names given to the back and forth playing of tunes between two opposing bands before and after a football game, which has four quarters of play.

Fabion Wilson: FAMU just puts you to sleep so blah, boring it's like a PWC [Primarily White College] band playin' R&B and rap tunes<sup>304</sup>

One of the hosts, Adro, was making positive comments throughout the review: "They adjusted. FAMU has done a great job adjusting to the SWAC. They adjusted they arrangements. They adjusted they approach. They even adjusted some of their field shows. They have done a great job, while keeping their identity."<sup>305</sup> He continued by reminding viewers of the legacy of the program. "When it comes to listening to FAMU for me, [what] you see is what you get from them. They're very persistent. They're not gonna change they ways, and they're very strong in their identity. And honestly, they're one of the originators of what we do right now."<sup>306</sup>

A much more balanced and complementary view of FAMU was seen in comments from a 2021 5th Quarter battle with Southern University, recorded and posted by SU's media team. Fans of the Human Jukebox are known to be unreasonably critical, but they were mostly fair minded and positive about FAMU's performance.

Henry Salce: 2 great bands killing it against each other. NICE!!!!

Music Project: This battle is making me smile!! Great job on song selections, dynamics and PHRASING... BOTH bands! MUSIC at its finest!<sup>307</sup>

The primary criticism that people agreed with was a long, even-keeled comment by Barron Visuals Productions, aimed at detractors of either band:

Music is SUBJECTIVE! What's good to one maybe bad to another! We all have PREFERENCE that doesn't mean one is better than the other...

FAMU: stop with the musicality excuse! Jazz was once thought as "non-musical" because it was unconventional! Just because other bands don't approach music

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<sup>304</sup> Comments on "Show Style Talk - Band Podcast (11-16-2022) Grambling vs Texas Southern, FAMU vs Alabama State," November 16, 2022, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BWuqiH5kZII>.

<sup>305</sup> Show Style Talk, "Show Style Talk - Band Podcast (11-16-2022) Grambling vs Texas Southern, FAMU vs Alabama State," video, 1:36:57, YouTube, November 16, 2022, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BWuqiH5kZII>.

<sup>306</sup> Ibid.

<sup>307</sup> Comments on "5th Quarter | Southern vs. FAMU 2021," <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=A9TBP8TPBW8&lc=UgxPEdBqT1BHziJhH754AaABAg>.

the way you choose to doesn't make them less musical. If you want to get to arrangements MOST bands outside your ballads have far more difficult arrangements that require a higher level of execution. "Playing loud" is not unmusical this is a narrative you all need to let go – DCI bands play louder than damn near anyone and they aren't seen as "non-musical." It's a defense mechanism you all use to feel better about not catering to Top 40 and sticking to your style – that's fine just don't diminish others for choosing other approaches...

SWAC Heads: diversity is good! FAMU and [Bethune-Cookman] are bringing something different. Outside of [Alabama] A&M, [Prairie View], [University of Arkansas Pine Bluff], and sometimes JSU – most SWAC bands fit in the same mold and approach. We aren't a monolith. No they may not be playing radio hits and centered in rap tunes, but they still do what they do well. They sound good! It's too appreciated not ridiculed. We all have room at the table and they just bring a different element. While I feel it lacks "personality" their overall goal is a symphonic sound – which to some comes off bland and cookie cutter. SU approach is a brass/jazz band approach. Both are good at what they do...

Two different styles, two different approaches both with room for improvement and some mistakes but good in the lane they walk. There is no winner here because it will boil down to PREFERENCE.<sup>308</sup>

Preference as a concept is encouraged but not always internalized by bandheads who view the Black bandworld as a Black-affirming space. White acceptance is seen as suspicious, because, cranking or not, all show-style aesthetics in band are still depicted as deficient in mainstream arenas.<sup>309</sup> Musicians from FAMU take pride in their sound because it has proven to delight not only their fans, but people and educators who listen to PWI bands as well. Earning a Sudler Trophy is an honor for any collegiate band. According to the John Philip Sousa Foundation, the awarding body, the biannual honor is meant to "identify and recognize collegiate marching bands of particular excellence that have made outstanding contributions to the American way of life."<sup>310</sup> Being the fourth group to win, in 1985, has been touted by the Marching 100 as validating their approach, in comparison to other HBCU ensembles. The

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<sup>308</sup> Ibid.

<sup>309</sup> This point of view is not based on historical facts.

<sup>310</sup> The John Philip Sousa Foundation.

foundation's award criteria indicate that "The Sudler Trophy [is awarded to a band] which has demonstrated the highest of musical standards and innovative marching routines and ideas, and which has made important contributions to the advancement of the performance standards of college marching bands over a number of years."<sup>311</sup>

History has revealed that applying a singular definition for an "American way of life," has not been advantageous for African Americans. Our "Americanness," as determined by others, is fluid, not concrete.<sup>312</sup> As Joshua D. Gailey has written, the very creation of the public school marching ensemble was to steer White children away from music identified as Black.<sup>313</sup> To date, FAMU is the only Black institution to win the Sudler Trophy. After seeing the PWIs on the list of winners, I question if other HBCU bands were even considered due to cultural biases, or if they bothered to submit material for consideration at all. I argue that the Fall 2022 season of Tennessee State and Norfolk State should warrant some attention.<sup>314</sup> Similar to the UIL adjudication pool, the Sudler Trophy selection committee lacks individuals who are well versed in HBCU show-style presentation.

Opinions can change over time. During another panel discussion on *Talk That Talk*, Antonio "Kunta" Holt II wonders aloud if cranking has gone too far, and why bandheads feel that FAMU gets compared to PWIs. His thoughts were prompted from watching a battle between Bethune-Cookman and FAMU and knowing both bands were labeled as boring.

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<sup>311</sup> Ibid.

<sup>312</sup> Matthew F. Delmont, an introduction to *Half American: The Epic Story of African Americans Fighting World War II at Home and Abroad* (New York: Penguin Publishing, 2022), xiii.

<sup>313</sup> Joshua D. Gailey, "Beginning Bands: Progressive Reform and the Birth of the American School-Band Industry, 1907-1940" (PhD diss., Yale University, 2019), 29.

<sup>314</sup> Tennessee State earned a Grammy in the Gospel category for their album *Urban Hymnal* (2022). They are the first collegiate band, HBCU or PWI, to earn such an honor. Norfolk performed a "Missy Elliot Mix" during a dedication for the artist in Virginia. The Legion performed brilliantly in other prestigious events, including the 2023 Edition of the Tournament of Roses Parade and the Remo Bandfest held in conjunction with the parade.

I love crankin'. I grew-up around it...but I still had an ear for what sound good and what don't...When I listen to FAMU and Bethune...it's boring, but man, they sound beautiful...I get both sides of the argument now. I don't think a lot of people seein' it because people will look at FAMU and Bethune and say, "Oh, they sorry." I look at them like, "Man, those some solid programs..." At first, when I was younger, I be like, "Man, I can't get into it." But more and more I start listening to it, I'm like "Bruh, it's twelve bands in the SWAC." And I'm like, "Look, how these two bands right here...ain't on everybody's list?"... It's gettin' to the point, yea it's crankin', but it just don't sound good, bro...I'm starting to notice that more and more, especially now working with high schools. I don't think a lot of people [are] understanding that. They'll look at sounding good as a PWI sound. Since when does sound have a label on it? <sup>315</sup>

In reality, FAMU's link to Black musical aesthetics is tangible and preferable for those who book them to perform. Along with staff, thirty-five members of the Marching 100 were flown to Paris, France, by the Louis Vuitton company as part of a fashion event at the Louvre, in June of 2022.<sup>316</sup> A highlight of their performance had them partnered with Kendrick Lamar, performing his song "N95" (2022). Florida A&M's music program recruits heavily from Georgia and many music educators in the state are graduates of the institution. One such individual, Don P. Roberts, is a pivotal figure in Black band culture in Atlanta. He has become a liaison between the music industry and show-style musicians while acting as Musical Director, Executive Band Consultant, and arranger for the *Drumline* film in 2002.<sup>317</sup> As a former member of the Marching 100, he draws upon that musician network to funnel musicians into projects for Missy Elliot, ESPN, the BET series *The Quad*, Beyoncé's *Homecoming* tour and documentary, and his creation, the stage production *DRUMLine Live*.<sup>318</sup>

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<sup>315</sup> Passion Is..., "Talk That Talk - Episode 59 So Much to Discuss: Where Do We Begin?!", video, 31:09, YouTube, November 30, 2022, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hV8oTZq0cn8>.

<sup>316</sup> HBCUGameday, "Marching 100 Heads Back to Paris," *HBCU Gameday*, video, 02:43, YouTube, June 11, 2022, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ys6Mg6ZcUTE>.

<sup>317</sup> Aaron Dodson, "Halftime is Game Time: An Oral History of 'Drumline,'" *Andscape* [Media Portal], <https://andscape.com/features/drumline-oral-history-of-the-movie/>.

<sup>318</sup> *Ibid.*, Music Education Alliance, "Bio- 'Don Roberts,'" *Music Education Alliance* [website], 2020, <http://www.musicedalliance.org/don-roberts/>; Good Day Atlanta, "Marching Band Leader Don P. Roberts on Good

In an instance that was very telling, Atlanta native Young Thug (Jeffery Williams), judged a \$25,000 challenge in which marching ensembles arranged, recorded, and posted a version of his single “Hot” (2019) onto social media. FAMU bested many other programs that submitted entries, proving that they are not disconnected from current trends and sounds. Snare drummer Terrance Bacon professed to be a bandhead and had listened to other entries. He felt that their arrangement had something to do with their victory, stating, “[Our’s] was the closest arrangement to the actual song... I was personally excited, because not only did we win a contest because we sound good, but the person that created it even said that I like how you took something that is original, and made it original for y’all.”<sup>319</sup>

The sound and style of FAMU resonates with many invested in Black culture, even though the band doesn’t embrace cranking. Most importantly, the program continues to attract highly skilled student musicians. They hosted over six-hundred middle and high school students during their 2022 summer band camp.<sup>320</sup> The replenishment of musicians and demands for their services counters the arguments of bandheads who label FAMU as boring, but this doesn’t mean cranking should be classified as a substandard manner of playing. The metaphor of EWF (not cranking) and Parliament/Funkadelic (cranking and crunk) works well because although vastly different, they are both linked to different versions of Black excellence in sounding, with only personal preference causing one band to be ranked over the other amongst Black folk. It is preference that must be respected, with all variations of show-style presentation concretely connected to Black musicianship.

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Day Atlanta,” <https://www.fox5atlanta.com/good-day-atlanta/marching-band-leader-don-p-roberts-on-good-day-atlanta>.

<sup>319</sup> Terrance Bacon, interview with author, August 2021.

<sup>320</sup> Andrew Skerritt, “The Marching ‘600’- FAMU Summer Band Camp Attracts Record Numbers,” *FAMU (Florida Agricultural and Mechanical University)* [Website], July 14, 2022, <https://www.famu.edu/about-famu/news/the-marching-600-famu-summer-band-camp-attracts-record-numbers.php>.

## Conclusion

Simon Frith, possibly ignorant of the Black bandworld, provides a quote that works in tandem with the Tricia Rose concept when explaining the development of interventionist musical practices:

The way an instrument is used and played may not be the way it was designed to be used and played – and the ever-changing ways in which “musical instruments” are distinguished from other sorts of sonic devices...A musical instrument, in short, is always an ideological object, even if the way sounds are heard is changed by a changing sound context... Some instruments are conservative; they are expected to conserve and perfect established ways of music-making and teaching... Other instruments are innovative, designed to change established ways of making music.<sup>321</sup>

EWF is responsible for repertoire that most HBCU bands have arranged, but their music isn't produced like Zaytoven's or Metro Boomin's, and is not laden with highly compressed TR-808 kick drums and dark-sounding synths. The primary problem in the ecosystem seems to be the lack of a concrete definition of what cranking is and how it should be employed, if at all. This contributes to confusion for those trying to establish a baseline to assert their own preferences as an educator, player, or listener. Trying to make sense of this takes nuance, and the willingness to appreciate different philosophies of sounding. Some are not willing to put in this amount of time and effort because it's much easier for them to see cranking as a metaphorical line in the sand. It is something to be embraced or rejected based on whatever criteria individuals want to use to support their argument. It doesn't help when established bodies like Texas Music Adjudicators Association can install bias covertly, therefore escaping accusations of cultural animus, even though show-style students and fans in Texas have already gotten the message.

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<sup>321</sup> Simon Firth, afterword to *The Relentless Pursuit of Tone*, eds. Robert Fink, Melinda Latour, and Zachary Wallmark (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), 369–370.

Cranking should be considered a modern way of playing, befitting certain types of tunes, but not above criticism. Findings show that it was born in Blackness, linked to a historical incorporation of interventionist musical practices valued in African-American spaces, which Rose framed as working in the red. However, it should never be thought of as the sole representation of Black folk, and what we can express musically. It has always been the reality of Black musicianship to know more, not less. Opinions aside, cranking must be acknowledged as a way of sounding that is linked to crunk, trap, or screw – more than it is to Swearingen, Grainger, or Sousa – which hold more relevance to Black listenership.

### Chapter 3: FOUR PILLARS IN BLACK BAND MUSICAL SETTINGS

When she was writing her text *Black Noise*, it was unlikely that Tricia Rose thought her work could or would be applied to marching ensembles. There has long been an open discussion amongst musicians and educators within the bandworld questioning whether show-style bands are fostering the type of well-rounded musicians they have historically produced. Rose is almost prophetic when stating that with Hip-Hop, there “remains a never ending battle for status, prestige, and group adoration, always in formation, always contested, and never fully achieved.”<sup>322</sup> When Dr. Lewis Lidell was Director of Bands at Jackson State, he wasn’t against the playing of Hip-Hop, but he does feel that HBCU bands have devolved because they have “completely submerged themselves into rap culture.”<sup>323</sup> Part of this culture of rap, or Hip-Hop rather, is the contest that takes place to prove who is a better emcee, DJ, or dancer – the battle. Show programs at all levels cater to the popular taste of bandheads or battle promoters, who are only interested in certain aspects of what bands do, instead of supporting all forms of expression in fully developed programs.

In this chapter, I explore four themes, or what I call pillars, to address these topics in the African-American bandworld. These concepts are not the only ideas broached during my research period, but the themes that I highlight were the most conspicuous in discourse and action throughout my investigation. Although each pillar is independent of the others, the concepts are discussed jointly in two sections. In the first portion, Pillars 1 and 2, aggression and battling, address the confrontational mannerisms ingrained in some bands, especially in terms of

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<sup>322</sup> Tricia Rose, *Black Noise: Rap Music and Black Culture in Contemporary America* (Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 1994), 36.

<sup>323</sup> David Ware, *Interviews With Sixteen Band Directors at Historically Black Colleges: Their Attitudes, Opinions, and Methods* (New York: The Edwin Mellen Press, 2008), 74.

attempts to comprehend the predilections and artform of bands battling each other. The need to entertain and the mission of educating, which constitute Pillars 3 and 4, will be examined in the second portion because of the delicate balance that is sought to be maintained between the two. Due to the cohesiveness of the various elements of culture in the Black bandworld, cranking, which was addressed in detail in the previous chapter, and the importance of incorporating a variety of repertoire, which is detailed in the next chapter, are also mentioned in this chapter.

### **Section I: Aggression and Battling (Pillars 1 and 2)**

Esteemed musician Danny Baker spoke about the jazz funerals and other functions the brass bands in New Orleans would perform for, when he was a boy. He indicated that there was usually more than one band for each parade function, which is something I noticed at a second line event in October of 2022. A battle for listeners and admirers based on the perceived entertainment value of each group would ensue, hinting that certain sounds were preferred by musicians and parade goers.

Many times the members marching to the second and third band would get annoyed at the strict serious music and tell a leader to play some barrelhouse or gutbucket music, and then the battle would be on. The bands would usually be a city block apart and the music would not [conflict], so when the fourth band finished a song, the second line would hear the wailing third band and rush to dance to that band. Then the second band would be heard and they would rush up to that band... These brass bands were highly competitive... the most exciting form of musical entertainment was not the jazz bands, but the brass bands...<sup>324</sup>

If bands were to gain listeners, they would need to be assertive and outplay their peers. Although the criteria for one band “outplaying” another was discussed in Chapter 2, and is highly subjective, these elements are based on historical grounding. According to John Rublowsky in *Music of America*, the brass bands that played with volume and fullness, or in

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<sup>324</sup> Danny Barker, *A Life in Jazz*, ed. by Alyn Shipton (London: Macmillan Press, 1986), 50–51.

modern terms, engaged in *cranking*, were the groups marked as great, and ready for battle.<sup>325</sup>

Scholars who have completed research with this community of musicians are familiar with the underlying ethos that ensembles perpetuate in attempting to best other bands they encounter, which is the same “informal competitive spirit,” tied to or apart from entertainment value, that has seeped into the culture of secondary, collegiate, or summer mass bands.

A theory of mine is that the forcefulness of New Orleans brass bands, traditionally embodied for professional purposes, eventually seeped into the marching band culture of the city because of musicians migrating between entities. This commanding ethos then spread to various HBCU bands that recruit musicians from the area. It is this brand of aggressiveness that is expected and appealing to band members who are taught that the objective is to “blow out” an opposing group.<sup>326</sup> Battling is a frequent and expected part of the Black band experience, and similar to the authoritativeness that bands embody, it is rooted in traditions coming from New Orleans.

Gerard Howard is a former New Orleans public school and Jackson State band member, and the current bass drummer for the Jackson-based Southern Komfort Brass Band. He emphasized that it was in junior high school that he learned to be more concerned with the opposing band, if present, than with entertaining patrons. As a major team sport in the Southern States, organized public school football was often played at the junior high/middle school level. Howard shared that at that stage, he learned how serious things were during his first game. When he marched with his junior high school band into the football stadium, the other band started to,

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<sup>325</sup> John Rublowsky, *Music in America* (New York: Crower-Collier Press, 1967), 133; Robert H. Clark, “A Narrative History of African American Marching Band: Toward A Historicultural Understanding,” 15.

<sup>326</sup> Blowing Out: a slang term used when one band convincingly outdoes another on the field or in the stands. It is usually applied to one band being able to play considerably louder than the others.

colloquially speaking, blow on them. Confrontations with other bands, at games or parades, were part of general band culture.

In New Orleans, you have to kinda put the high school and junior high school components together. We saw as much action as the high schools saw. New Orleans is a little bit different. The bandworld is kinda really catching up to it now. We had football season where most bands go at it. But then we had parade season. And it wasn't just about it being a parade season. We went at it before the parades. When I say "went at it," as soon as somebody got off the bus...Matter of fact, you was waiting for the action as soon as you left the band room, before you left the parking lot. Before you left the school, everybody was about that action. By the time you hit the parade grounds, you was waiting for somebody to line up against you...So for us, obviously junior high schools are feeders for high schools, but in New Orleans, it's an easy continuation. The action that we saw in high school is the same as we saw in junior high school. The spirit of it was just the same.<sup>327</sup>

In this section, I explore the situations, locations, and purposes that cause musicians to draw upon a certain amount of aggression that defies divisions between secondary, tertiary, and summer bands. In the entire Black bandworld, there is a pride expressed in outdoing other bands, who are deemed opponents. In truth, some bands consider these occurrences an opportunity to battle, regardless of whether it was planned or appropriate, or if the other groups want to engage or not. All actors in the Black bandworld are familiar with this mantra, even if they don't agree with it, with some groups opting to prepare more than others. A degree of toughness is thought to be needed for these situations. Show-style bands use sports and military tropes to channel aggression and present an aura of strength and vitality.

Eileen Southern has written about the long-standing tradition of musical sport that manifests in different areas of African-American music-making, which listeners enjoy witnessing. Instrumentalists pushing themselves to best other performers have always held

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<sup>327</sup> Christy Walker, "Gerard Howard-Behind the Lens," March 5, 2021, in *The HBCU Band Experience with Christy Walker*, produced by Dr. Christy Walker, podcast, MP3 audio, 05:19, <https://hbcubandexperience.podbean.com/e/behind-the-lens/>.

entertainment value for Black audiences, and these instances represent a certain variety of Black joy: when musicians are placed in situations where aggression is encouraged, musical contests occur, and goals of engrossing listeners are fulfilled. Matt Sakakeeny writes, “just like in sports, learning teamwork in band is all bound up with learning competition... When bands line up against each other in the stands at football games, or perform their field shows at halftime, they are there for battle, and there will be winners and losers. Egos get bruised.”<sup>328</sup>

Sports is a commonly used trope in all of the marching arts because it is easier for the layperson to relate to, and because, as Gaily asserts, establishing the marching ensemble in twentieth-century public school was supposed to mirror the masculinist ideals of athletics.<sup>329</sup> Acceptable American masculinity, where sports are valued over the creative and performing arts, is what has been instituted here. Drum Corps International, through the foregrounding of their World Class Division, has proclaimed the superiority of their product to other marching arts entities by comparing their activity to Major League Baseball. The slogan “Marching Music’s Major League” is a sports trope and marketing tactic used to attract not just the drum corps fans but new listeners as well.<sup>330</sup>

Athletics as a trope used for band has become such a common point of reference that even those who see themselves as allies to Black bands can’t truly relate to the culture on its own merits. Hollywood executives responsible for financing *Drumline* (2002) defined the film as a sports movie, which is different from how bandheads interpreted the work. Gerard Howard is a band media luminary, and named one of his online entities [marchingsport.com](http://marchingsport.com). He also feels that

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<sup>328</sup> Matt Sakakeeny, “‘We’re Not just Shooting the Breeze’: Marching Bands and Black Masculinity in New Orleans” *Southern Cultures* 27, no. 4 (Winter 2021): 46, <http://libproxy.sdsu.edu/login?url=https://www-proquest-com.libproxy.sdsu.edu/scholarly-journals/were-not-just-shooting-breeze/docview/2638291738/se-2>.

<sup>329</sup> Joshua D. Gaily, “Beginning Bands Progressive Reform and the Birth of the American School-Band Industry, 1907–1940” (PhD diss., Yale University, 2019), 90.

<sup>330</sup> <https://www.dci.org/static/about-drum-corps-international>.

the competitive nature of New Orleans band members who look for bands to battle at any time has infiltrated HBCU collegiate bands, and is accompanied by the same type of “intent, aggression, and ferocity” as a sports team.<sup>331</sup> Howard wanted to document band culture because he thinks, “People on the outside [don’t] understand how serious it is...The aggression was real.”<sup>332</sup> The sports trope creates an easy method to help the uninitiated understand that the aggression channeled in athletic competitions can also be applied to band.

Many students are in an environment that cultivates assertiveness that is part of the first pillar. Sakakeeny, as not only a scholar but also an advocate and board member for the New Orleans music education organization The Roots of Music, gives readers an inside look into a rehearsal with band director Darren Rodgers. The Marching Crusaders Band is composed of students ages nine to fourteen, and the scholar reveals the ease in which aggression is developed among them.<sup>333</sup> Rodgers is a former member of the well-known St. Augustine High School Marching 100. Like many from New Orleans, he chose to attend Southern University and play in The Human Jukebox, but later transferred to Talladega University, in Alabama. Each high school and collegiate group attempt to develop a style that is unlike that of others, but aggression is an underlying element in many of them. When teaching the Roots’ students his arrangement of “The Whole World” (2001) by OutKast, Rodgers instills aggression and strength in playing from the outset. “You can put a little oomph on some of the notes...Y’all sound like a third act. Y’all sound like the Kidz Bop version. I need you to come with that smoke.”<sup>334</sup> When addressing the

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<sup>331</sup> Gerard Howard, discussion with author, May 17, 2023.

<sup>332</sup> Ibid.

<sup>333</sup> “About – The Roots of Music,” *The Roots of Music* [website], <https://therootsofmusic.org/about/>.

<sup>334</sup> Sakakeeny, “We’re Not just Shooting the Breeze,” 47.

trombones and woodwinds, he issues a warning: “I told you you’re too nice. Put some aggression on the notes. Sound mad or I’ll make you mad. OK?”<sup>335</sup>

Secondary programs that incorporate a pugnacious demeanor provide students with skill on their instruments, but also foster a predetermined nature. Metaphors that illustrate aggressive acts like “punching” or “putting your foot down on the gas” are often expressed.<sup>336</sup> JSU graduate Dr. Ollie Liddell directs a well-balanced program at Central High School in Memphis, Tennessee. His program is considered comprehensive; complete with a jazz ensemble and symphonic band that both do well at adjudicated festivals. Yet it is with the marching ensemble that a more dominant nature presents itself with teachers and students. Another JSU alum, Assistant Band Director Jaylon Taylor, was a student of Dr. Ollie Liddell in his first year at Central. Since returning, he reinforces an approach that was taught to him while in high school – assertiveness. He explained a situation that occurred when Central played Dyer County High School in the Fall of 2022. The staff from Central received email complaints from parents of the opposing band claiming they didn’t give their students opportunities to play. Jaylon refuted the supposed tackiness of his group, instead contending that the Dyer County group was unprepared.

We went in there and crunk-up from the start of the game to the end of the game... We crunk on them the whole time. When it was time for us to go to the bathroom after the halftime show, their fans [were] literally clapping for us. Like, “We’ve never seen a band like that. That’s what y’all do in Memphis? Y’all sound so good. Y’all so entertaining. Y’all blowin’ us out.”<sup>337</sup>

I raise a theme that will reappear throughout the chapter. Corps-style groups, like Dyer County, differ from show-style groups, like Central, with regards to being aware of or concerned

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<sup>335</sup> Ibid.

<sup>336</sup> Samserai Cardenas, interview with author, April 30, 2023.

<sup>337</sup> Jaylon Taylor, interview with author, March 2023.

with outdoing or besting the other band in non-adjudicated situations. Dr. Darryl Singleton, in his ethnographic study, reported that “[show-style] bands are cognizant of who their ‘opponent’ will be to the point that they often include chants, verbiage in show narration, or other show elements specifically aimed at the other band. When they play in the stands, they often physically turn as a band to focus their sound towards the other band...”<sup>338</sup> I asked Claire Milburn about this aspect of band culture with the PWI Louisiana State University. She worked with them while a graduate student there and was able to compare their band traditions with Jackson State’s. This point is poignant because Dr. Kelvin Jones, Director of the Tiger Marching Band, is also a former Sonic Boom member. Nevertheless, Claire stated that LSU were “not at all,” concerned with what the other band was doing.<sup>339</sup> “It’s very formulaic with them. They have tunes for the first down, the second down, the third down...They don’t really change it up a lot. It’s very expected. They care about who they’re playing based on the football team. A lot of time either the band won’t come, or they’ll bring fifty people. They won’t bring the full band.”<sup>340</sup> Regardless of the parallels that DCI, other corps-style groups, or PWI bands retain with athletics, an overt aggressiveness aimed at other bands is not embraced by these ensembles.<sup>341</sup>

To automatically equate behavior to environment can be dangerous, but the connection between them shouldn’t be completely ignored either. Some students in show-style groups come from neighborhoods where combative situations occur. In these areas, being in the band is characterized as a positive activity and thought of as a healthy way to release the frustrations of daily life. Two contrasting statements, both from people in Atlanta who have led completely

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<sup>338</sup> Darryl Marc Singleton, “Black Band for Brown Students: A Culturally Relevant Pedagogy,” (DMA diss., Boston University, 2020), 192.

<sup>339</sup> Claire Milburn, interview with author, August 2, 2020.

<sup>340</sup> Ibid.; There was some nuance with LSU in their game against Southern University in Fall of 2022. LSU did engage in battle with SU after the game.

<sup>341</sup> The University of Southern California Trojan Marching Band is a known exception to this rule.

different lifestyles, can help illustrate this point. Competition in drum corps is intense and compelling, as explained by Courtney Brant on an episode of *The Global Bandroom* podcast. Drum corps competition is driven by the scores given by judges during the field show. I remember listening to recorded comments from judges, what we called “judges’ tapes,” procured after field shows and drumline competitions at the high school and DCI level. The organized and adjudicated head-to-head style of battling, which alleviates any possibility of impromptu confrontations, only began in corps-style culture approximately ten years ago.<sup>342</sup> Aggression does not factor into the equation here, or with any high school groups that are instructed in this style. Unfortunately for Brant, her only exposure to show-style culture was through the movie *Drumline*, and through communicating with friends from Georgia Tech who were in the film but whose scenes were cut. Her unfamiliarity with the Black bandworld influences statements that are short-sighted and off the mark:

I don’t want to take away anything from the HBCU experience. It’s very different than the one I went through. I like that there’s diversity around that kind of film that’s been out. But I think to really follow one competitive band, or drumline, or any section really. Yeah, I like *Drumline*, but there’s other places you could see it. The pageantry of it all really lends itself to cinema. I’ll use DCI as an example. If you go to finals, you can’t stop watching. You get the goosebumps. This could just go onscreen.<sup>343</sup>

Marie A. Douglas, who went to Southside High School in West Atlanta before matriculating at FAMU, is from a different neighborhood than Brant. This contrast is reflected in her statements about the overall meaning of being in the band, the ensembles’ significance in helping to deal with the environment, and the way aggression is released constructively:

Band programs mean more than entertainment or ratings for festivals, because the music changes the lives and trajectory of people. It’s just about making

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<sup>342</sup> Adam Perlmutter, “Head to Head,” *Drum Corps International 2013 Yearbook*, 2013, 44–46, 48.

<sup>343</sup> Keith Kelly, “36: Courtney Brandt,” April 9, 2021, in *The Global Bandroom*, produced by Keith Kelly, podcast, MP3 audio, 17:63, <https://www.podchaser.com/podcasts/global-bandroom-1436603/episodes/courtney-brandt-confessions-of-89006658>.

music...Everything for us started with that, and that's just what it has always been. These are moments for us to congregate and be free together. I think that's the importance of it in the Black community. To channel somethin'. The households we grew up in, the stuff we're exposed to, you gotta fight that with somethin'. You got PTSD. It doesn't matter what you say. First, you gotta get past high school at least. That's what these programs do. It's cathartic. Your energy's into something positive. I saw what it was doin', and I got as many people as I could to join with me... Our anger was channeled into, "You know what? We fiddin' ta blow y'all out. We're not puttin' our energy into fightin' no more."<sup>344</sup>

With this contrast now in mind, I asked Central High School student Kendrick Williams about his impression of Dyer High School, and if those students really knew what they were facing. He felt as if they may not have been prepared for their style of band because most programs in the state of Tennessee outside of Memphis are corps-style groups.<sup>345</sup> They are not battle tested and ready. Despite knowing this information, the band from Central made the decision not to take it easy on Dyer.

In show-style groups, sound is weaponized, but not in a torturous way that is harmful to human beings. It should be compared to the warm but heavy and high volume sounds heard during a Jamaican soundclash.<sup>346</sup> Bands strive to play enjoyable sounds in an authoritative manner. Ensembles crank with just enough aggression to make the opposing ensemble feel uncomfortable and inadequate in their ability to respond. The act of getting to the stadium early to blow on a band as they march into a venue is a tactic that JSU's rival, Southern University, employs often, and is itself an act of aggression that Sonic Boom members have had to endure. As the recipient of such treatment, alumnus Joseph Beard recalls SU using Crucial Conflict's "Hay" (1996), to "[play] on us in full disrespect, in our home stadium, trying to make us look

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<sup>344</sup> Marie A. Douglas, interview with author, March 24, 2021.

<sup>345</sup> Williams, interview with author.

<sup>346</sup> Erin Macleod and Joshua Chamberlain, "Sweet Reggae Music Pon di Attack: A History of Soundclash," *Red Bull Music Academy* [online portal], October 12, 2016, <https://daily.redbullmusicacademy.com/2016/10/a-history-of-soundclash>.

like fools.”<sup>347</sup> When acting as Director of Bands for Jackson State, Dr. Lewis Liddell didn’t want loudness to lead to ignoring good intonation, balance, or blend, but there have been times when he has felt that a more forceful sound was needed.<sup>348</sup> As a means to retaliate against Southern, Dr. Liddell sought payback the year following their act of aggression. He told Milburn that he referred to this assertive response as a “showering down” of sound.<sup>349</sup>

When Southern gets to that gate, I want to stop all marches, get the loudest rap tune in the book and play it. I don’t know the name of it (laughing)... but get it. And so, we played the marches, all pretty little stuff. And we got there and uh... Southern got right in front of us. The whole stadium was quiet [and] wondering what was going to happen. And we unloaded-ha! Unloaded. Unloaded everything on them – raw power.<sup>350</sup>

Instead of avoidance, there is a fair amount of aggressive back and forth that bands covet. An exchange between groups during the 2022 Texas Southern versus Southern football game had bandheads everywhere talking. Southern, as the away team, performed their field show first and returned to the stands. In an unprecedented move, TxSU, led by Director of Bands Brian Simmons, decided to instruct the Ocean of Soul to line up in front of the Human Jukebox *during* their field show.<sup>351</sup> TxSU proceeded to play Nate Dogg’s “Nobody Does It Better” (1998) as aggressively as possible in SU’s direction. This Simmons arrangement is a well-known tune for the Human Jukebox, written by him in his previous position as Chief Arranger for the band. Simmons reclaiming his arrangement for his current group is another level of playful disrespect, which may have been invisible to the outsider, but all within the bandworld knew the magnitude

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<sup>347</sup> Joseph Beard, “A Fixed Fight,” in *The HBCU Experience: The HBCU Band Alumni Edition*, ed./author Christy A. Walker and Ashly Little (Self Published: The HBCU Experience, 2022), 91.

<sup>348</sup> Ware, *Interviews*, 75.

<sup>349</sup> Claire Milburn, “An Oral History of Marching Band Traditions at Historically Black Colleges and Universities” (master’s thesis, Louisiana State University, 2019), 54.

<sup>350</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>351</sup> KBThaBandhead, “The CIVIL WAR between TXSU and SOUTHERN has begun.. SU it’s your move 🇺🇸 #hbcu #shorts,” video, 01:00, YouTube shorts, September 19, 2022, <https://www.youtube.com/shorts/fXJwRJHddrY>.

of this action. TxSU clarinetist Samserai Cardenas did her best to explain the consequences of this act. “So I remember we were practicing for it, and we were determined to do... like the most disrespectful in terms of marching band...the day of the performance, and we did it. It was like everybody was running on adrenaline.”<sup>352</sup> The response from SU, also the first that I’ve seen, was an attempt to interrupt a portion of TxSU’s field show by playing over them. Some have expressed the thought that Simmons might have anticipated this act of defiance from the Human Jukebox, as he spoke on the stadium PA, admonishing his former band for their lack of decorum. He ended with “Southern, now you have my permission to play,” as TxSU played their last note, to the delight of Texas Southern’s fans.<sup>353</sup> I asked Ms. Cardenas if Mr. Simmons knew that SU was going to play in the middle of their show.

I don’t remember if he talked about it. That’s the thing. But I’m pretty sure like everyone knew it was gonna happen. How would you feel if your old band director went to your rival school, played your own song against you, and then just walked off the field? That is some disrespectful things...To me, I think that was fun. But I know that if I was on the receiving end sitting there, I would have been so mad. I would have been upset.

As it was mentioned in Chapter 2, the amount of perceived aggressiveness bands present falls along SWAC/MEAC conference lines in the minds of aficionados. I defer to Milburn for intricate details in this matter; one quote in particular that she elicited from former Southern Director of Bands, Nathan Heymer, stands out: “SWAC is more in your face. MEAC is more...friendlier shall I say.”<sup>354</sup> Even when a band, such as the Purple Marching Machine of Miles College, is in a division for smaller schools, like the Southern Intercollegiate Athletic Conference (SIAC), their confrontational behavior causes bandheads to associate them with the

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<sup>352</sup> Cardenas, interview with author.

<sup>353</sup> Smash Time Productions, “Civil WAR! | TxSU vs SU Halftime Madness! (How It All Went Down!),” video, 04:40, YouTube, September 18, 2022, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RFgS5vkKvTk&t=290s>.

<sup>354</sup> Milburn, “An Oral History,” 67.

SWAC. On Episode 51 of *Talk That Talk*, entitled “The Ignorance Is Back!!!! Are We Here For It Though?”, panelists discussed the scenario of the Southern versus Texas Southern game. The objective of this program is to tackle topics that can help improve the quality of music education for Black bands. Kuan Mitchell, a PVAMU Marching Storm alum, feels that the boisterousness shown by both groups is part of the SWAC persona. However, he thinks the degree of aggressiveness shown is a modern-day phenomenon. “It’s more ignorant [ignorant] now due to social media.”<sup>355</sup> Maya, the dance specialist on the panel exclaims, “Ignant s\*\*t gets you hype, that’s why!”<sup>356</sup> Two viewers offered their opinions supporting each perspective. UCDance supported Kuan’s statement when saying, “...[Since 2012]...The aggression in most groups [has] been intensifying.”<sup>357</sup> Scarfinger Hoodrich stated, “As a bandhead and not a musician, I’m here for the ignorant shat. [A]ll of it.”<sup>358</sup> Just like in Hip-Hop, beef, drama, and disrespect attract attention in the bandworld. A good diss song is remembered across generations, as is a band getting shown-up or blowed out. Kuan feels lines have been crossed when thinking about showing mutual respect for the opposite band and its director across the field. He believes that younger students may not know that there should be boundaries. “We have to be careful about what we’re feeding our kids.”<sup>359</sup>

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<sup>355</sup> Passion Is..., “Talk That Talk - Episode 51 THE IGNORANCE IS BACK!!!! ARE WE HERE FOR IT THOUGH?” video, 47:26, YouTube, September 21, 2022, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DweaWw3zIMk&t=2290s>.

<sup>356</sup> Ibid., 56:48.

<sup>357</sup> Comments on “Talk That Talk - Episode 51 THE IGNORANCE IS BACK!!!! ARE WE HERE FOR IT THOUGH?” <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DweaWw3zIMk&t=2290s>.

<sup>358</sup> Ibid.

<sup>359</sup> Passion Is..., “Talk That Talk - Episode 51 THE IGNORANCE IS BACK!!!! ARE WE HERE FOR IT THOUGH?”

If this attitude is not being intentionally fed to students, then perhaps it is nevertheless being encouraged by crowd reactions. Jaylon Taylor details the attitude and feelings Sonic Boom members possess as he relates cranking as a performance practice to assertiveness:

[Cranking] is pure bliss and aggression. [People don't know] how angry we actually get...It's like when they about the call, [a song] and we know we stompin' out the other band. It's like people stomping on the ground, on the bleachers... Like, come on...Let's go! It's like, let's go ahead and smash these folk. He says, "horns up," and three-hundred people get quiet, 'cause they ready, they put horns to they face, they embouchure [is] set. And then it's, "1 and 2 and 3 and [inhales]." That first note smack, and then you play that last note and you see the crowd like, "OOOO!"<sup>360</sup>

The reputation of the MEAC as "soft" among many bandheads is something they dispute. They admit that there are differences in a general philosophy between the two conferences, but that doesn't mean that MEAC bands completely abstain from channeling aggression in all situations. Again, on *Talk That Talk*, Julian Luke, panelist, moderator, and NSU Spartan Legion alum, has argued against the mischaracterization of his former bandmates as "soft." He expressed that there was a disconnect between the amount of aggression they held versus the amount they were allowed to show.

I marched in a band with negros from New Orleans, Detroit, Texas, [Richmond, VA]. We'd be ready to fight because we knew we could play better. There's just this thought process and a stigma that thinks that there was a lack of aggression with us... We were aggressive – we just didn't have directors in that same vein with us. They wanted to keep a certain prestige.<sup>361</sup>

As an intensifier, SWAC or SWAC-influenced bands have adopted another trope of aggression – combativeness accomplished through militaristic symbolism. These trappings are not unique to the show-style band environment, as all marching band instructors lean on the nomenclature and mannerisms of military bands to instill discipline in their groups. The

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<sup>360</sup> J. Taylor, interview with author.

<sup>361</sup> Passion Is..., "Episode 51," 1:07:15.

militarism I am referring to, however, stems from a form of strength or faux toughness rendered from being raised in an urban environment. Unlike Edwin Hampton, who was a veteran and musician, and who instilled in the St. Augustine Marching 100 a strong sense of precision and decorum, many people who use military references to present this type of strength have not served, but still rely on this imagery to present a type of impenetrability and aggressiveness used when facing another band.<sup>362</sup> This trope hasn't permeated the entire ecosystem of the MEAC or bands in other conferences as heavily. It is also a point of departure from any concept that I knew of in corps-style culture, where military shadings are linked to allusions of military bands, or with Texas A&M, whose style and presentation mirrors those of actual military bands.<sup>363</sup> When I mentioned the relationship of aggression to military symbolism to New Orleanian Gerard Howard, he exclaimed, "It fits!"<sup>364</sup> He continued by saying, "Every time you step out...the bus, it's war time.... For us to go out and attack another band."<sup>365</sup> We agreed that using military imagery over the sports trope was a certain kind of "leveling-up."

Again, the New Orleans influence on the SWAC is key. Derrick Tabb is founder and instructor at The Roots of Music, but also snare drummer for the Rebirth Brass Band. These groups are primarily street bands, and differentiate themselves from jazz musicians, who they characterize as inside players.<sup>366</sup> A certain amount of fortitude is required to play outside for parade functions, especially since violence occasionally occurs.<sup>367</sup> Tabb often collaborated with

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<sup>362</sup> Sakakeeny, "We're Not just Shooting the Breeze," 55.

<sup>363</sup> Texas A&M will only perform marches and patriotic songs, and executes military precision-style drill.

<sup>364</sup> Gerard Howard, interview with the author, May 17, 2023.

<sup>365</sup> Ibid.

<sup>366</sup> Kyle DeCoste, Walter Ramsey, Dee Holmes, Ellis Joseph, and Alfred Growe III, "The Power of a Story: Negotiating Narrative in Group (Auto)Biographies with New Orleans Brass Bands" (roundtable discussion, 2022 AMS-SEM-SMT Joint Annual Meeting, Hilton New Orleans Riverside, New Orleans, LA, November 13, 2022).

<sup>367</sup> When I informed my friend, a New Orleans native, that I was attending a second line in October of 2022, the first thing he texted was for me to be careful. I responded that although I was going to have fun, my eyes and ears were open, with my head on a swivel.

rapper Soulja Slim, before Slim’s death in 2003.<sup>368</sup> The credibility gained from hailing from an urban setting fit with Hip-Hop and brass band stylings. The song created with Slim, “You Don’t Wanna Go to War,” was featured on Rebirth’s 2008 release *Hot Venom*, and has become brass band and marching band standard repertoire. It isn’t clear if this was a direct remake of “You Don’t Wanna Go to War 2” (1997), by Mia X, but the Rebirth version is the one that has resonated with parade participants in New Orleans and school marching bands in the marching band belt.

Other manifestations of this trope are seen in the style of dress. It’s common for many show-style groups to wear military gear, like fatigues, boots, and hats, to rehearsal or performances.



Figure 3.1: Whitehaven High School band members, in boots and fatigues.

The Whitehaven High School Sounds of Perfection, from the Memphis area, wears such paraphernalia, as do other groups (see Figure 3.1).

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<sup>368</sup> Matt Sakakeeny, *Roll With It: Brass Bands in the Streets of New Orleans* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2013), 113.

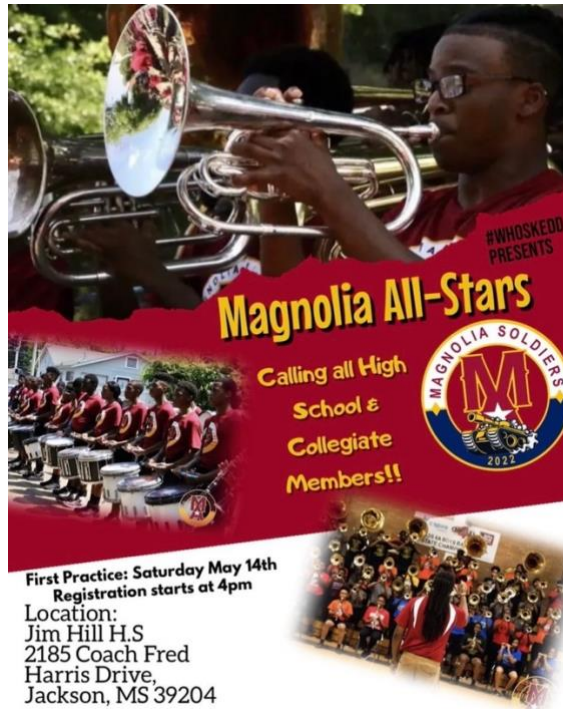


Figure 3.2: An audition flyer for Magnolia-All Stars (Magnolia Soldiers summer band).

The mass band in Jackson that I observed in June of 2022, with mostly high school students, was named Magnolia All-Stars, but also used the name Magnolia Soldiers on their recruitment flyers, complete with a picture of a tank (see Figure 3.2).



Figure 3.3: Advertisement to join “TeamBustEmUp.”

The Edna Karr High School Band uses the slogan “TeamBustEmUp” (see Figure 3.3). This original logo appears in social media postings and on clothing that the director Mr. Herrero and the students wear. The most vivid example I can provide is with Dr. Darryl Singleton, and his profile of “City High School,” in the Houston area. “You Don’t Wanna Go To War” is not just a song, but a chant that students direct towards the bands they play against. It is their theme song, and the students don T-shirts with the slogan printed on their backs.<sup>369</sup>

While the amount of aggression that marching band students embody needs to be monitored, it is unarguable that to display it through sound is an Afro-Diasporic practice that has been in place for an extended period of time. Whether it is through jazz musicians participating in “cutting contests,” me playing drums during turntable or emcee battles, or when I participated in battles against other drumlines as a member of JSU’s drum section, the competitive edge that Robert H. Clark discussed as a historical aspect of Black marching bands follows a lineage of assertiveness present in various areas of African-American musicking. Aggression is needed to battle, or you will lose. Either in unplanned situations or in heavily promoted profit seeing ventures, battling is a common occurrence in the Black bandworld that musicians need to prepare for.

Dr. Timmey Zachery of PVAMU and Brian Simmons of TxSU presently lead these two bands during the yearly Labor Day Classic Football game between the rivals. The seriousness of this obligation was impressed upon podcaster Eddie Robinson so concretely, he concluded that, “You all talk about this in terms of the other band being your competitor. This is not, I’m going as an appendage to my football team. I am going with my own competitor in mind.”<sup>370</sup> Zachery,

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<sup>369</sup> Darryl Marc Singleton, “Black Band for Brown Students: A Culturally Relevant Pedagogy,” 155.

<sup>370</sup> Eddie Robinson and Melayne Price, Episode 23, “Halftime is Their Time,” October 28, 2021, in *I See U with Eddie Robinson*, produced by Eddie Robinson and Laura Walker, podcast, MP3 audio, 05:59,

a former United States Navy bandman, quoted Sun Tzu's *The Art of War* in relation to knowing your opponent. He shares that he breaks down footage of the other band like a football coach to prepare the Marching Storm for the upcoming week's opponent. Simmons put things in a larger perspective when mentioning competition. He feels that bands are battling for bragging rights and recruits.

We look at it as competition because we have a job to do. We're not just auxiliary. We are just as responsible for recruitment as everybody else [on] campus...Band is the game of what have you done for me lately. What you did last week, nobody's worried about that. So every year, every performance, you have to go hard. Every performance is somebody's first time seeing you. With that being the case, you can't go in there half-steppin'. We competing for too many things. We're competing for cultural relevance. A student is gonna look at what the Prairie View side of the football stadium is doing versus the Texas Southern side of the football stadium. They're gonna look at what role the band plays...Students nowadays [are looking] for much less of a music education. They're looking for more of a music college experience. We have to come in there locked and loaded to provide these things...It's bigger than a football game.<sup>371</sup>

Although there are a few HBCUs like Talladega, which have marching bands without football teams, the ensembles are primarily connected to this athletic activity. The format that bands follow for games is set on the collegiate level, with some deviations on the secondary level. The strategy for playing is divided by quarters. Although there are what can be classified as skirmishes throughout the four quarters of the game, the primary battles that bandheads consume in-person or through social media take place before and after the contest, while the bands are in the stands. The Zero Quarter is the pregame stand battle, and the 5th Quarter occurs after the football game is finished.

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<https://www.houstonpublicmedia.org/articles/shows/i-see-u/2021/10/28/411949/i-see-u-episode-23-halftime-is-their-time/>.

<sup>371</sup> Ibid, 08:33.

Some groups like FAMU and Albany State do a pregame performance on the field, but most groups in the SWAC forgo this element to engage the other band in several “rounds” (like boxing) of musical exchange. Jaylon Taylor reported that at Jackson State the Zero Quarter was used to intimidate the opposing group. “We got a saying: ‘You wanna crush a gnat with a sledgehammer.’ We fiddin’ to try to blow that band back to the bus before the game even start.”<sup>372</sup> He is expressive when describing bandheads arriving two hours ahead of game time in order to catch the Zero. “Because it’s unregulated. There’s no timeouts....that’s when you can get your full arrangements played, without gettin’ cut off by the announcer.”<sup>373</sup>



Figure 3.4: Jackson State University Sonic Boom of the South at the 2022 Soul Bowl.

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<sup>372</sup> J. Taylor, interview with author.

<sup>373</sup> Ibid.



Figure 3.5: Alcorn State University Sounds of Dyn-O-Mite at the 2022 Soul Bowl.

The Jackson State versus Alcorn State University game has been nicknamed “The Soul Bowl,” and is always a high energy affair for the in-state rivals. Figures 3.4 and 3.5 show JSU and Alcorn situated in the stands directly across from each other, for maximum confrontational effect. For assessment purposes, serious bandheads try to sit in the section between the two bands, which is where I was seated for the November 2022 game. The battle was recorded and

posted by many band media outlets, but I cite Justin Patterson's content here.<sup>374</sup> Alcorn began the battle while JSU was still warming up, but at 03:01, JSU responded in kind, with “Tomorrow” (2022), by Glorillia. This tune was used by JSU during battles throughout the academic year.

If we classify Zero Quarter as the undercard, and bands engage in skirmishes during the four quarters of the game, then the 5th Quarter can be thought of as the main event.<sup>375</sup> The term 5th Quarter was applied by Dr. Christy A. Walker and Michael Lee, in 1999, for a website, and eventually a podcast they created dedicated to HBCU band content.<sup>376</sup> It was named as such because of the people who tend to stay after the football game to watch and listen to the bands battle each other.

I again turn to Jaylon Taylor for commentary on the 5th Quarter. He comments on what he feels is the best way to get people engaged.

5th Quarter, that's when you save your full heat. It's just like the Zero, where it's not regulated timewise. You can do what you wanna do, and you can play those songs long as you want to. That's where you save your technical pieces, because you want everybody to be fully focused on you. Zero quarter, people still talkin'. People still gettin' drunk. They still gettin' situated. 5th Quarter, they've been sittin', they've been drinkin', they're tired, they just wanna hear some bands play. So they gonna sit there and they really, really focus a hundred percent on the band, for thirty minutes long on average.<sup>377</sup>

The determination of which band wins a Zero Quarter, 5th Quarter, or any non-adjudicated battle, relies on public opinion. Former SU bandmember and band media content

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<sup>374</sup> Smash Time Productions, “Alcorn State SOD vs Jackson State | Zero Quarter 2022 (Soul Bowl Exclusive!!),” video, 17:14, YouTube, November 20, 2022, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FnLayz6naI4>.

<sup>375</sup> These are boxing terms. The main event is the last match of the night, and the undercards are the warm-up matches that occur before.

<sup>376</sup> Dr. Christy A. Walker and Ashley Little, *The HBCU Experience: The HBCU Band Alumni Edition*, 16. The University of Wisconsin Marching Band has initiated a 5th Quarter, after-game performance since the 1970s. In their tradition, the Wisconsin crowd will sing along with the band while the ensemble plays tunes from the field. Band members will also engage in light-hearted dancing or other routines. It is a different affair than show-style band 5th Quarter activities. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=J1g6nUq1bUc>.

<sup>377</sup> J. Taylor, interview with author.

creator Jerome Law from *Show Style Talk* provides insight on the thought process of many bandheads when it comes to assigning victory to one band over another. After watching a 2022 5th Quarter battle between Texas Southern and Alcorn, he gave his criteria as to why he assigned a higher point value to TxSU. The ability to entertain is addressed in detail in the next section, but Law is also stressing the importance of entertainment value here:

The key to a great 5th quarter...Number one is familiarity with the music. If you get everybody to sing, you done won half the battle already. That's just what it is. Alcorn, y'all was playin' a lot of stuff...But what the hell were you playin'? That's where Texas Southern may have won the crowd over, where people sayin' it was a blowout. It really wasn't. But sayin' it was a blowout, because they played "Cutie Pie" [and] they played "I Can Love You," they entertained the crowd. As a musician, goal number one is to sound great. Goal number two is to be entertaining. You gotta learn how to do both.<sup>378</sup>

Another environment where all levels of bands engage in battle is before and after parades. Parades require bands to assemble in the "line-up" area, which allows the participating groups to organize themselves in the order of performance before starting the parade route. Bands also need to play musical exercises and warm up on instruments, like athletes doing pregame calisthenics and drills, which allows performance preparation. It is here where Gerard Howard has said that bands are "looking for that action." Although I observed battles before the 2023 Martin Luther King Day Parade in Jackson, here I focus on New Orleans, because of the sheer number of parades they participate in, and on Atlanta, because the level of seriousness is similar, but the requirements for battling are different.

In New Orleans after football season is over, bands perform in a dedicated parade season. Groups participate in Christmas parades in December, Martin Luther King Day parades in January, and Saint Patrick's Day parades in March – all with battles occurring. Howard

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<sup>378</sup> Show Style Talk, "Show Style Talk "Band Podcast" – (10-26-22)," video, 02:23:16, YouTube, October 26, 2022, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9Y2QJwZnncY>.

continues to share his thoughts, saying, “We battled all the time. Period. In New Orleans if you had two bands together before an event, there will be a battle...Before every parade...That’s been happening for decades. Easily before I joined the band. If there’s two bands, there’s gonna be at least one round exchanged.”<sup>379</sup>

Mardi Gras in February is considered the height of parade season. Battles that occur at this time are known to be fierce and draw crowds to the city specifically for these encounters. These are not organized battles, and they can start instantaneously. There may be a coin toss to decide who goes first if relations are somewhat civil, but bands may also ambush each other, “walk up on you,” and begin to blow without warning. Samserai Cardenas shared her memories of a Mardi Gras battle in 2022. Although she singled out Langston College as the aggressor, footage indicated that it was a three-way battle between Langston, Texas Southern, and Talladega.<sup>380</sup> She made sure to tell me that it was not TxSU that started the battle.

Woodwards are in the back. We’re not knowing what’s going on.. Only like, “There’s a band playing?” And then we’re like, “All right, guys. Let’s line-up. Battle formation!”...Here we go. It’s no question. You never know when you’re gonna get...in a fight in real life. So, the same thing applies to band. So you never know when someone’s gonna pull up and try to crank on you. Just don’t get cranked on.<sup>381</sup>

Samserai did not indicate that the date in 2022 was a Bloody Sunday, but video evidence shows this to be true. “Bloody Sunday” is a day when Jaylon Taylor has explicitly stated that bands are “at each others’ necks,” before the Krewe of Bacchus Parade, which is the Sunday before Fat Tuesday.<sup>382</sup> Howard shared that secondary schools have always battled at this time,

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<sup>379</sup> Gerarad Howard, March 21, 2023.

<sup>380</sup> Killa Kev Productions, “Talladega College Vs Texas Southern Vs Langston University - 3-Way Bloody Sunday Battle - 2022,” video, 27:49, YouTube, February 27, 2022, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QjlxRiXIKH4>.

<sup>381</sup> Cardenas, interview with author.

<sup>382</sup> J. Taylor, interview with author.

like they do any other time, but the name was associated with the collegiate battle between Southern and Talladega, and went on to be superimposed onto all activities for the day. Multiple battles will occur simultaneously, which can mean the listening experience may not be ideal, but the energy coming from the bands still draws listeners towards them.

In the 2023 edition of the parade, the battle between two New Orleans high schools, Edna Karr and George Washington Carver, stood out. The execution and song selection by both groups was praised by reactors, with Karr's mellophones and Carver's trumpets being singled out for their elevated level of play. Taunting, as is customary during battles, is sometimes built into the songs themselves. When Carver played Fantasia Barrino's "Lose To Win" (2013), the band director, students, and their followers sang altered lyrics, while waving an "L" hand sign toward Karr, in rhythm with the tuba and percussion accompaniment.<sup>383</sup> To the amusement of listeners, Carver changed the Barrino chorus from "Have you ever needed someone so bad," to "Have you ever takin' an 'L' so bad."<sup>384</sup>

Both *Show Style Talk* and King KVO reactors felt that the battle was entertaining, but awarded Carver the victory for the day. King KVO was specific with his assessment. Note that aggression is an attribute he felt needed to be assessed, as well as that of having a diverse book.

Carver had the "wow factor." They had the execution. They was clean, with the aggression. And to be honest bro, you really didn't know what to expect from them, bro. They book was pretty diverse bruh, I ain't gonna lie to ya. If you really take their book, versus Edna Karr book, it was more diverse, and it was well executed bro.<sup>385</sup>

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<sup>383</sup> Show Style Talk, "Show Style Talk – Band Podcast (3-13-23) 'We Back' 1st Show of 2023 #bands #showstyletalk," video, 01:54:30, YouTube, March 13, 2023, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eJifIBiTGso&t=17s>.

<sup>384</sup> Franne Golde, Andrea Martin, Dennis Lambert, Fantasia, Walter Orange, and Harmony Samuels, "Lose To Win," 2018, *Genius*, <https://genius.com/Fantasia-lose-to-win-lyrics>.

<sup>385</sup> King KVO, "EDNA KARR VS GEORGE WASHINGTON CARVER BLOODY BACCHUS (2023) FULL BATTLE #REACTION," video, 45:25, YouTube, February 28, 2023, [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5\\_Dg2jLYNWc](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5_Dg2jLYNWc).

John Rublowsky, in *Music of America*, indicated that New Orleans brass bands were traditionally judged on having a wide and stylistically varied number of selections included in their repertoire, in addition to having a full sound. In the Black bandworld, this is what we now call having a “book.” An ensemble’s book is the vast repertoire of songs a band has memorized and is able to execute at their highest level. Having diversity within one’s book means that a variety of moods, styles, or genres can be interpreted by the band effectively. This displays that a band is prepared and guarantees that selections are not repeated during the battle.<sup>386</sup>

Samserei has a strong recollection of her time battling in her high school band, and the advantage she feels is carried with a diversified book of songs. A distinction she made dealt with the tunes arranged for cranking and others that were not.

We had the most diverse book [while in high school], because Mr. [Alex] Frazier. Since he has experience from Southern, he knew the importance of having a diverse book. So we’ll have, like a slow song, or an upbeat, technical song... So, we would play something, and then the other school probably plays something that was just for cranking or just for loud... And we would hit them with a technical song, and they couldn’t really answer back.<sup>387</sup>

Mr. Frazier himself confirmed Samserei’s estimation in an interview he completed with a news outlet when stating, “We are able to do some things others are not able to do... We have some blues, R&B, contemporary, such as ‘Willie Wonka and the Chocolate Factory.’ We want to be as versatile as we can.”<sup>388</sup>

Whether in conjunction with parades or otherwise, Atlanta has a battle culture that is different from New Orleans, but just as intense. Marie A. Douglas brought clarity to the concept of the high school jamborees I watched online. She states that several events in the metro Atlanta

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<sup>386</sup> Rublowsky, *Music in America*, 133.

<sup>387</sup> Cardenas, interview with author.

<sup>388</sup> Mary Meaux, “MHS Marching Heat Ruling The South As Show Band,” *The News* [online], November 10, 2016, <https://www.panews.com/2016/11/10/mhs-marching-heat-ruling-the-south-as-show-band/>.

area were conceived by Don P. Roberts, who once served as the music coordinator for DeKalb County School District.<sup>389</sup> These spring semester, standstill battles feature two high school bands on opposite sides of the fifty-yard line, trading songs. Aggression is still present at these battles, but it is not as intense as at a football game or a parade. Many examples have been posted online, but here I cite two. During a battle between Stephenson and Southwest DeKalb, video evidence from 2003 shows Stephenson members turning their bodies away from the audience and towards their opponent in order to blow on them.<sup>390</sup> This is a common tactic used to intimidate the opposite band, when they are set-up side-to-side from one another.

Another example is from a 2015 battle with Stephenson. Their announcer can be heard challenging the skill level of MLK, who proclaim to be “The Kings of Halftime.” MLK performed an entrance number that relied on chants, crowd participation, and showmanship, rather than the full band playing their instruments.<sup>391</sup> During the introductory chapter, I stated that I would not be covering the sonic material of the announcers in this study, but in this case the announcer’s improvised response to the opposing band concretely demonstrates the confidence displayed by Stephenson’s musicians.

Yet these performances are more about appeasing patrons. According to Marie A. Douglas, “The format of these songs and these shows is very pageantry, entertainment industry – almost eye-to-eye [with] what we were doin’...What we continue to do, it’s just highly

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<sup>389</sup> Music Education Alliance, “Bio- ‘Don Roberts,’” *Music Education Alliance* [website], 2020, <http://www.musicedalliance.org/don-roberts/>; The Smith Center, “The Band Director Who Brought Marching Bands to the Movies...and the Theater,” *The Smith Center* [website], January 12, 2017, <https://thesmithcenter.com/explore/smith-center-blog/the-band-director-who-brought-marching-bands-to-the-movies-and-the-theater/>.

<sup>390</sup> TAPEMASTER, “Southwest Dekalb vs. Stephenson – 2003 (Jamboree),” video, 06:45, YouTube, February 18, 2013, [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DUHRb\\_1OO1k](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DUHRb_1OO1k).

<sup>391</sup> Masonj12yahoo, “MLK VS Stephenson-2K15 Spring Jamboree,” video, 10:33, YouTube, May 11, 2015, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ND15Tm7TsFM>.

entertaining, and it models after things like stage shows. Earth, Wind, and Fire, Kool and the Gang... This is that entire show format... We're imitating live concert shows."<sup>392</sup>

Parades in Atlanta hold the same possibility of confrontation as they do in New Orleans. The Atlanta Football Classic was an event held from 1989 until 2014, and featured TnSU and FAMU for most of its tenure.<sup>393</sup> Like many HBCU classics, parades are scheduled in tandem with the game and feature high school bands along with colleges. Douglas explained that the "action" that bands want can take place before or after the parade's completion.

At the end of that parade [there] would always be a battle... You go in the Georgia Dome area... It could be before the parade [or] after the parade, but you gonna get blown [at] because people are gonna walk by with they band. "Oh..there go Southside [Marie makes horns up motion]." Let's get it, you know? This is what I mean by channeling the energy... That's what battles are like. You could just get walked up on. I remember Columbia High School. They didn't care if you were a college or a high school. They were blowin' on Tennessee State.<sup>394</sup>

As stated earlier, not all people associated with show-style bands are enamored with them being prone to battle. In certain instances, school affiliates, be they teachers who don't teach music, or administrators who think music educators have too much autonomy, are individuals who try to micromanage band directors. In New Orleans, aficionado and liaison Burga Brooks spoke of a circumstance where he felt an administrator didn't understand bandworld ethics, and therefore did not support the program.

I've literally been around, helpin' somebody with band, and the principal walked up on the band director and said, "We don't do all that battlin' and stuff. That's too ghetto..." And it blew my mind, because I was like, "Is she from New Orleans?" I had to ask, "Is this lady from here now? She don't know that's how this go?" And then we thought that was the end. We get on the bus after the parade, [and she's angry]. "... I don't wanna do all that ghetto stuff!" ...Bruh,

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<sup>392</sup> Douglas, interview with author.

<sup>393</sup> R. Pierre Rodgers, "'It's HBCU Classic Time!': Origins and the Perseverance of Historically Black College and University Football Classic Games," in *The Athletic Experience at Historically Black Colleges and Universities*, eds. Billy Hawkins, Joseph Cooper, Akilah Carter-Francique, and J. Kenyatta Cavil (Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield, 2015), 151.

<sup>394</sup> Douglas, interview with author.

that's too much when you got a principal that just don't respect what you do. She found [the band director]. She reached out to him [and] begged him to come take over this program.<sup>395</sup>

In this section, focusing on Pillars 1 and 2, I explained different iterations, formats, venues, repertoire choices, and types of resistance to aggressive battling in the Black bandworld. This is not a complete picture, but it does give readers an understanding of what the author has seen and heard in the discourse during the past three years. The entertainment value attached to battling, and the requirement for student musicians to entertain in general, via band performance, is covered with Pillar 3, along with the educational value students may or may not be gleaning from these or other activities, in Pillar 4. For many, the idea that high school musicians need to understand the art of entertaining is a foreign concept, but as will be fleshed out in the next section, this is a basic underlying premise for show-style bands.

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<sup>395</sup> Crucial Conflict: Where Legends Collide, "Crucial Conflict: Where Legends Collide," video, 17:26, YouTube, July 17, 2020, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-fpAnBqfpe8>.

## **Section II: Educate Versus Entertain Dilemma (Pillars 3 and 4)**

My musical growth, between graduating from JSU in 1997 and moving to Japan in July of 2000, was spent improving as an arranger, player, and educator in San Diego. I was taking interviews for full-time teaching positions when a principal in the San Francisco Bay Area somehow came across my CV. He asked if I was interested in the band director position at his middle school because of my HBCU background, which had led to an assumption that we had shared musical values. He stated very plainly that a show-style band was what was wanted at his school, with the Grambling Tiger Marching Band being the model. I told him, frankly, that middle school beginner to intermediate students should not dance with their instruments before learning to play properly. There were plenty of ways to construct a culturally responsive music curriculum for his student body, but what he was suggesting was not in the students' best interest. I also told the principal that I had an extensive background in Hip-Hop and other forms of Western and non-Western music, which I could use to easily integrate fundamental music pedagogy with culturally responsive material, but marching and dancing would not be part of the equation. Requiring beginner students to be a source of musical entertainment for adults was not an atmosphere that I was interested in. I can't remember his response, but nevertheless, I didn't get the job.

Crowd excitement and engagement is measured by one key word in the Black bandworld: entertainment. It is a universally acknowledged fact within the ecosystem, even if accepted reluctantly, that the role of the band is to entertain, because band culture is connected to the discernment of the general Black populace. While there is a plethora of research analyzing the White gaze on Black bodies with expectations to entertain, there is extraordinarily little

information in music scholarship, if any, about Black student musicians entertaining Black audiences.

In this section, I try to voice and unpack the interrelated debates in the bandworld tied to the educational mission of marching bands in general, and Black bands in particular, while these groups strive to entertain Black audiences. Throughout the course of this research, tensions that manifested themselves between students being asked to entertain versus them getting space to learn without that pressure were constant and ever present. Disagreements emerge when there is a perception that the entertainment factor is overriding the educational value of the activity, and regarding whether this expectation is healthy for junior high/middle school musicians at all. Another problem on the high school and collegiate level is that there is a sense that the field show is becoming devalued over playing in the stands and other forms of standstill battling. Social media clips are leveraged for recruitment purposes, but they are also blamed for hastening this scenario. Lastly, I thoroughly investigate the phenomenon of summer bands. Since these bands play in mostly a standstill battle format, heavily rely on Hip-Hop arrangements, and embrace cranking as a performance practice, many musical educators have openly questioned their educational relevance and have asked their students not to participate.

Perhaps the goal of bands' entertaining didn't begin with Dr. Patrick William Foster at FAMU, but present Chief Arranger Lindsey Sarjeant revealed in an interview with Assistant Band Director Dr. Nicolas Thomas the dedication that Foster had towards that end.

[Dr. Foster] always felt that the purpose of marching bands, the purpose is to entertain the audience. So, with that in mind... he always wanted people to appreciate what he did...How can you entertain the [B]lack audience? You entertain the [B]lack audience through dance...He didn't want to just play music of dead composers so to speak; but he just wanted to keep all the music relevant as possible.<sup>396</sup>

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<sup>396</sup> Nicolas Brandon Thomas, "William Patrick Foster: Dean of African American Bandmasters" (PhD diss., University of Georgia, 2013), 149–150.

For most students in the Black bandworld, it is communicated to them starting in secondary school that there are expectations to entertain. On the May 5th episode of *Show Style Talk*, after scoring a high school battle, Adro had a message for band students who may have been viewing the program. “I want y’all to understand somethin’. You are an entertainer now... You’re here to entertain. [Loudly and sarcastically says] ‘Entertain me! Entertain me!’ That’s the mindset of the crowd. I want you to understand that.”<sup>397</sup> While many students are drawn to participate in band because they are interested in the presentation style and modern song selections of the ensemble, many of them, especially on the middle school/junior high level, are unaware of the demands that might be placed on them.

In Chapter 1, I spoke of educators in the Black bandworld who come from a working musicians’ background and know of the type of presentation that may be appealing to patrons. Many of these working players/band directors really want beginners to focus on fundamentals, because they understand the real-world demands of professional musicianship. Jaylon Taylor enlightened me about his middle school teacher, James “JRob” Robertson, who as a drummer based in Memphis has performed with Isaac Hayes, Al Green, and Bobby “Blue” Bland.<sup>398</sup> Robertson even made time to record with Melissa Etheridge, in 2016, while continuing to teach full-time at Snowden Middle School.<sup>399</sup> His ties to the entertainment world remain intact, but Robertson stressed music fundamentals and working through method books when J. Taylor was

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<sup>397</sup> Show Style Talk, “Show Style Talk – Band Podcast (5-10-23) ‘Band News/Battle Recaps,’” video, 01:38:12, YouTube, May 10, 2023, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HORDRsQH2Io>.

<sup>398</sup> David Waters, “Snowden Band, Still Marching to Mr. Robertson’s Beat,” *The Commercial Appeal* [online newspaper] March 30, 2016, <https://archive.commercialappeal.com/topstories/snowden-band-still-marching-to-mr-robertsons-beat-2f1d14b7-a4f5-7233-e053-0100007f19d0-374032921.html>.

<sup>399</sup> Discogs, “Melissa Etheridge – Memphis Rock and Soul,” <https://www.discogs.com/release/9187060-Melissa-Etheridge-Memphis-Rock-And-Soul>.

a student under his baton.<sup>400</sup> At Snowden, the entertainment factor that some seek is held by the educator, and not the students, in the eyes of the community. Several Snowden alumni recall hearing Roberston practicing drums during his planning period.<sup>401</sup> His energy drew all students – not just band students – to the bandroom.

Current TxSU band director Trenton Hunter shared his approach to teaching middle school band, which included some deep thoughts about the expectations placed upon young players. He feels that they need time to develop strong reading skills and good intonation before any thoughts of entertainment should arise. For this reason, he endorses concert band instead of marching band at this level, but he is also aware of the pressure generated from parents, other teachers, administrators, and the public for the marching ensemble.

Marching band brings expectations. And it brings a very public expectation, which is just not great for beginners... Having to worry about that ridicule. Because even though they're kids and most of the time people will, you know, say that they're cute and whatnot, there's some people, too, will be like "Those kids are not good." And for those kids, they have to deal with that when...they're not equipped to defend themselves from that criticism. I just don't think it's right. I really think it's putting the cart before the horse, [but] you're gonna get pushback from all your colleagues – the teachers in the school. You're gonna get it from administrators because they want what they want.<sup>402</sup>

Hunter's views shifted when it came to high school, where, regardless of whether it is a scheduled class or not, marching band is usually a required part of the equation. Joshua D. Gaily's work may shed some light on why marching band is the primary vehicle for music education in American public schools, but regardless of the underlying reasons for the investment in this model, many band directors in the Black bandworld support the dual purpose

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<sup>400</sup> J. Taylor, interview with author.

<sup>401</sup> WMC Action News 5, "Middle School Band Champions Praise Band Director," *Action New 5* [multimedia web portal], May 22, 2017, <https://www.actionnews5.com/story/35489948/middle-school-band-champions-praise-band-director/>.

<sup>402</sup> Trenton Hunter, interview with the author, March 16, 2023.

of the ensemble. For high school students, Hunter states that, “Educating is the main priority, because they’re not finished products, either... You still have to educate. But... high school is an arena where you are expected to produce some type of product... I don’t see any problem with expectations at the high school level.”<sup>403</sup>

Jayon Taylor supports Hunter’s point of view. He explains, “The crowd wanna hear us blow out the other school.”<sup>404</sup> He goes on to mention that on occasion alumni band members return wearing band paraphernalia of the college groups they are now members of. They come to check on the status of the band, making sure a certain level of quality is being maintained. “They stand at the bottom of the band just like colleges,” he says.<sup>405</sup> “They wanna cheer their band on and not be embarrassed when they walk away.”<sup>406</sup>

Being raised within the yard–neighborhood dynamic of Alcorn State University, Chesteron Frye understood the entertainment factor of bands as a boy before he became a secondary school music educator in Louisiana. Our discussion was focused on his method for entertaining patrons at the football games, while continuing to educate students.

Chesteron Frye: I’m educating [and] entertaining. All my songs serve a purpose. Like if I play “[Got My] Whiskey,” by Mel Waiters, I’m doin’ that for the older crowd... They wanna hear some blues. The zydeco music out here... I’m in a rural area that loves [Creole] trail rides. I got to play my gospel songs to entertain for people who don’t care about none of this rap stuff, or none of this R&B... The young babies want to hear “Baby Shark” when it got hot.

Kevin Green: Y’all was playin’ “Baby Shark?”

Frye: Man, we were blowing “Baby Shark.” Two shark costumes, and puttin’ it on the kids, and lettin’ them go in the crowd with the people. I’m here to entertain... I do this for everybody. But when I first got into the band director

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<sup>403</sup> Ibid.

<sup>404</sup> J. Taylor, interview with author.

<sup>405</sup> Ibid.

<sup>406</sup> Ibid.

game, I had to learn that... It's about the crowd, and it's about the kids... They got on me for not playin' songs they wanted to hear.<sup>407</sup>

Janiya A. Charlton expressed what she learned as a high school student about the art of entertaining. She presently applies what she learned in high school to her leadership style as piccolo section leader in the Albany State University Marching Rams, and intends to retain this philosophy when becoming a music educator. In her estimation, the skill of reading your audience and being versed in assorted styles of music are both connected to entertaining and being an educated musician.

Janiya A. Charlton: I feel like if we came to a game and just start playin' ...marches and jazz tunes, [the audience] wouldn't necessarily be able to identify with it. That was one thing my [high school] director used to explain to us very strongly. When you're [in] a marching band, you're catering to the masses. So you want to play something that will move them, that will get them involved, and get them happy.... To be a musician is to be well-rounded. If you want your child to play one genre, you're short-changing them essentially... You want them to be called for a gig, or called to teach somewhere [and be prepared]... As musicians we're entertainers by trade. And if you can't entertain, or if you can only entertain to a certain group of people, then you have limited your potential.

Kevin Green: This was the high school director sayin' this?

Charlton: Mmmm, hmmm. And he was sayin' you can't play for yourself. Because musically, of course I would like to play a march. You got 16th notes in there. It got cool runs. It's very interesting for musicians, because it's harder music. But, the average listener would not be able to appreciate the difficulty in the music because they don't identify with that. So that's what makes our community with marching bands so different. Because we play music they like and hear regularly. They like to watch us and listen to us and support us.<sup>408</sup>

On the collegiate level, Texas Southern's Brian Simmons is on the record stating "When it comes to marching band, especially when you talk about [HBCUs], our first job is to, one, educate, and two, to entertain. A lot of times we want to focus on the latter, and that's not what

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<sup>407</sup> Chesteron Frye, interview with author, February 8, 2022.

<sup>408</sup> Janiya A. Charlton, interview with author, September 30, 2022.

it's really about. It's still music education.”<sup>409</sup> However, not all high school directors support the dual mission of HBCU bands, nor want their students to attend them. “Education” in reference to band is centered on music, but the human development that takes place with HBCU students involves the entire university experience. There are additional aspects of learning, being, and doing that my own secondary instructors didn't understand. The type of nurturing, musical or otherwise, that occurs when you have a person like James “JRob” Robertson at Snowden Middle School, occurs while being immersed in Black music aesthetics. It gives you a sense of purpose and pride that compels students to weigh HBCUs as a collegiate option as heavily as a PWI or conservatory.

Dr. Lamon Lawhorn, Assistant Professor and Coordinator of Percussion Studies at Virginia State University, was a standout student in high school, and ran into this problem when receiving pushback from his director for favoring PVAMU over the more famous North Texas State. A discussion with Eric Jimenz, a fellow Prairie View alum and colleague who created *The Score* Podcast, revealed an experience that the two had in common with Samserai Cardenas and Dr. Singleton. All four of them knew of the contempt many arts directors and teachers in Texas have for show-style bands. In his reflections, Dr. Lawson underscores the reasons students choose HBCUs over PWIs by reliving his own situation as a student, but also sharing his experience teaching at his former position at North Carolina A&T:

I can remember Prairie View coming down to recruit when I was like a junior, and [my director] was like “my students don't go there.” When I chose to go to PV she didn't talk to me for like two years...A lot of directors may think, if I send my students to this HBCU, they're not gonna get the same education. Now what you deem education for you is not the same education for that student, especially if it's a Black student or a student of color that's at a predominantly White

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<sup>409</sup> *I See U with Eddie Robinson*, Episode 23, 05:59.

institution...Students [expressing] their wish to be at [North Carolina] A&T is because they want to matriculate with other students that look like them.<sup>410</sup>

While he is no longer a director for the PVAMU Marching Storm, Jimenez stated that he routinely received emails from students at corps-style high schools expressing interest in the university, but when the band staff tried to follow up with directors of those schools, they did not receive responses. He also confided that many disparaging comments, and unfair criticisms, about show-style bands were often said in front of him without hesitation, usually under the assumption that he would agree because of his Mexican-American heritage.<sup>411</sup>

The reality of the situation is that both critics and advocates of show-style bands feel that the need to entertain is being prioritized over the educational factors that playing in HBCU-style bands can provide. Dr. Zachery is very frank as to how he thinks oversaturation and easy access to content via social media is causing ill effects on programs.

It all had a certain modicum of perfection that has gotten lost in the last twenty years, because we're in the YouTube generation, and all of the other digital media, where what you did is not relevant because I saw it. We're constantly trying to meet that benchmark. But by doing so we are literally having to dumb-down our products. You can't learn as many songs that are grade 4 if you're playing eighty of them...You got to dumb it down, so you're playing half notes and whole notes, so they can play the songs that people know. And I don't think that is going to push us to the level we need to be at...<sup>412</sup>

When Dr. Zachery is talking about the use of whole notes and half notes that are often used in modern arrangements which he considers to be beneath the collegiate level repertoire, he is referencing Hip-Hop without naming it explicitly. The problem with this assertion is that

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<sup>410</sup> Eric Jimenez and Justin McClean, Ep. 46, "Ep. 46 The Black Percussionist: A Chat with Dr. Lamon Lawhorn," November 9, 2020, in *The Score*, produced by Eric Jimenez and Justin McClean, podcast, MP3 audio, 29:39, <https://podthescore.buzzsprout.com/493009/6281674-ep-46-the-black-percussionist-a-chat-with-dr-lamon-lawhorn>.

<sup>411</sup> Eric Jimenez and Justin McClean, Ep. 8, "Ep. 8 HBCUs: Why They Matter in Music Education," September 23, 2019, in *The Score*, produced by Eric Jimenez and Justin McClean, podcast, MP3 audio, 32:54, <https://podthescore.buzzsprout.com/493009/1751059-ep-8-hbcus-why-they-matter-in-music-education?t=0>.

<sup>412</sup> *I See U with Eddie Robinson*, Episode 23, 24:40.

halftime shows, battles, and many other performances will feature bands alongside Hip-Hop figures such as French Montana, Drake, 2 Chainz, Big K.R.I.T., The Migos, and Lil' Boosie, just to name a few. Using Hip-Hop to remain relevant is necessary for show-style bands.

Kerry Gillard, Bowie State alum, composer, and high school band director, is in agreement with Dr. Zachery. He is a proponent of what he calls a “full-orbed” educational model for HBCU bands, or what others understand as building a program that prioritizes concert and jazz ensembles. He, too, thinks the emphasis on entertaining is having detrimental effects on programs, and thinks his model exposes students to a wider variety of music in general, and band literature in particular.

The university level directors need to be a lot more serious about full-orbed music education. Yes, we can have our high-stepping groups out there. We can do our dance routines. We can play all of this great music. But if we don't present actual music, and a varied repertoire of music... So when folks come out of there and they become educators, even if they're not music majors or musicians, they're still used to hearing bands playing a whole bunch of different music. Not all of the same music. Not the same half note, whole note, blow as loud as you can music. We need to be more serious about music education. And educating even our non-musicians to think musically and to think about the arts in a proper way. So that when they become administrators over programs and over people, that they don't kill off these programs and kill off the culture.<sup>413</sup>

His point of using music education to influence those who will become administrators, or frankly, those who will be the supervisors of band directors that impact the effectiveness of programs, falls into the realm of music appreciation. Many music educators feel that highlighting the concert band, symphonic band, or wind ensemble has the power to expand the palette of the layperson beyond ensembles playing popular music. Secondary school directors have complained about administrators undercutting their educational efforts – from decreasing their

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<sup>413</sup> Christy Walker, “You Naaaame It!,” March 12, 2021, in *The HBCU Band Experience with Christy Walker*, produced by Dr. Christy A. Walker, podcast, MP3, 34:25, <https://hbcubandexperience.podbean.com/e/you-naaaame-it/>.

preparation time via having them unexpectedly cover classes outside of music during the school day, to pressuring them to have the marching or pep ensemble perform for events at the last minute, during concert season.<sup>414</sup> The message many students are receiving is that the need to constantly entertain can supersede their interest in a complete program, even if it's something they themselves seek.

The standards and sometimes the financial health of HBCU bands are greatly tied to the entertainment model, which has come to limit flexibility and different modes of creative expression. When I entered the Sonic Boom in 1992, it was the first time I had heard of the concept of “getting house” as a response to a field show. The idea of getting house, or “housing out” speaks directly to the measurable reaction elicited from audiences as a result of a band’s commanding performance, especially in comparison to the opposing group. It is the determining factor of the creative impulse of the ensemble. When we played Southern my first year, the upperclassmen stressed the importance of getting house so incessantly that my drum corps background led to me to think there would be adjudicators on the field to score us. It was a cultural difference I didn’t fully grasp up to that point, because the stakes were not clear until the middle of the game. It is the crowd who judges, and if the band fails to entertain, you won’t hear any response from them. If the band is unsuccessful in getting any house, which I unfortunately recall happening a few times in my two-and-a-half years in the ensemble, it is not ignored by

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<sup>414</sup> Like athletics, the primary activities that bands participate in during the academic year are organized by season. For many bands, fall is marching season and spring is concert season. New Orleans has parade season after the winter break due to the heavy demand for them to march. All spring activity for marching band is seen as a hindrance to concert season, which is where many band directors feel is where most of the learning is accomplished. I and some other JSU oldheads have noticed the amount of spring commitments the marching band has been involved with, in comparison to our time in the 1990s. We fear that students are not getting ample opportunity for individual practice time, or to focus on their non-musical academic classes.

attendees. You will hear plenty of criticism from friends, other students, alumni, and anyone else who is upset and feels the performance was subpar.

To be clear, the gallery of critics I had to face always judged our field show performance, not the stand battle. The issue that is most affecting the state of the bandworld is that standards between many bandheads and music educators are in conflict. The situation becomes untenable when the bandhead applying pressure to succumb to their whims is also the high school principal, the president of the university, or some other high-ranking administrator. They often have their own ideas of how the band should be representing itself and can be overbearing with their demands.

The house one would expect to procure from a well-executed field show is received in some instances, and may result in meeting the demands of an opinionated administrator, but to the chagrin of many alumni and music educators, younger students and bandheads prefer hearing bands play in the stands, during jamborees, or in other standstill situations where drilling is not involved. When questioned about the preferences that modern aficionado may look for in a band, panelists and commentors from *Talk That Talk* had varying opinions. Laporsha Dortch, as usual, was very blunt:

To be good in the stands. I don't think mainstream culture appreciates field shows anymore...I think the mainstream is looking for them to be loud in the stands. Play stuff off the radio, which is all fine, well, and good, but I just think the standards are lower from what we expect. I think you used to have more holistic marching bands who could give you a halftime show and give you good stand music...I don't know how we got here, but here we are. People are looking for and accepting if they "blowin' that h\*" in the stands, if they sound good in the stands, we ok with them bein' lackluster on the field...This culture of the stands is weird to me, but that's what became popular because of [the dancers]. Because of social media. Because of the shortness of [band content video] clips and stuff like that...That's what I'm guessing....Popular culture has influenced what is

considered “top tier” [makes air quotes] in band. I think that has shifted what people prioritize in band.<sup>415</sup>

Band content provider Justin Patterson says that performing field shows and playing stand tunes should be looked at equally, but he also wonders why the newer generation preferring the stands over the field show is such a problem. Porsha counters with the widely held view that students of previous eras wanted to show a more diverse skill set. She asserts, “Everybody can stand still and play...Can you march and play?”<sup>416</sup>

What I found interesting are two contrasting opinions along these same lines, from two interlocutors associated with Central High School. High school student Kendrick Williams likes to perform a well executed field show. He thinks field shows, and not playing stand tunes, should be the focal point of the entertainment factor that bands display.

Everybody can sit in the stands and play music from memory. That’s something that any band should be able to do. But if you can get on the field [and] have a drill, playing your songs, [and] entertain? Our one job is to entertain people. People come to hear musicians. Why? Because they want to get entertained. So during your field show, if you can get on the field, play your music, your drill look nice, you’re entertaining... That’s what people are really there to see. For show style, they come for the halftime. Halftime come, the bands fiddin’ to go on the field, everybody gathers around, got their food, eatin’. Ain’t nobody goin’ nowhere.<sup>417</sup>

Perhaps, in efforts to refocus attention on educational endeavors, directors from particular programs are starting to enter their groups into an emerging circuit, which is tailored toward adjudicated field shows. Errick Prince has created a nationwide network of events through USBands.<sup>418</sup> Prince hails from Westover High School, a strong show-style program in Albany, Georgia, but chose a corps-style collegiate program, and has worked as a brass instructor for The

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<sup>415</sup> Passion Is..., “Talk That Talk – What’s Wrong with People Liking the Stands Over the Field?” video, 02:05, YouTube, October 4, 2022, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KKxhfalCrcI>.

<sup>416</sup> Ibid., 04:53.

<sup>417</sup> Williams, interview with author.

<sup>418</sup> USBands, “2023 Events,” <https://usbands.org/events/?type=show-style-band>.

US Army Band and taught in DCI settings.<sup>419</sup> This adjudicating body, linked to the Blue Devils Performing Arts Organization, will begin their third year of holding contests specifically for their “Traditional/Showstyle” category, in 2023. The creation of this network has not been conflict free. Prince has been accused of “selling us out” to “culture vultures” by individuals in the Black bandworld because of the network ties to Drum Corps International.<sup>420</sup> The introduction of a new title, STATS, or Standards and Technical Adjudication for Traditional Show Styles can be confusing for many who are content with the status quo and resistant to change. I too have concerns, which are not about the efforts Prince is making, but I am hesitant to trust other individuals in USBands, who are unfamiliar with show-style presentation, to remain “hands-off.”

Prince has been making the necessary allegiances to maintain the integrity of show-style events. USBands has created a Grand Championship contest, in Arlington, Texas, by partnering with The Roland Parrish Battle of the Bands. This well-established singular battle, previously held in January, enjoys a good reputation in the Black bandworld, and Prince, through the Roland Parrish Foundation has secured monetary awards for the finalists, for the November 4th, 2023, contest.<sup>421</sup> Bands will do what is called a “retreat” after the competition’s completion, which means that student leadership from each band will be on the field to hear score announcements and receive medals and trophies. Like for many show-style battles, a local celebrity host and DJ will be involved in entertainment aspects of the function. Prince is dedicated to “[highlighting]

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<sup>419</sup> Staff Reports, “Albany Natives Conduct All-American Band,” *Albany Herald* [online version], January 21, 2017, [https://www.albanyherald.com/news/local/albany-natives-conduct-all-american-band/article\\_7ccabe83-9286-5e67-b42a-ada6c960987c.html](https://www.albanyherald.com/news/local/albany-natives-conduct-all-american-band/article_7ccabe83-9286-5e67-b42a-ada6c960987c.html); Blue Devils Performing Arts Organization, “Staff-2023 A Corps Staff,” *Blue Devils Performing Arts Organization* [corps website], <https://bluedevils.org/programs/a-corps/seasons/?module=staff>.

<sup>420</sup> Passion Is..., “Talk That Talk - Episode 84 I’m At a Loss for Words,” video, 15:11, YouTube, June 21, 2023, [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jA3\\_PL9KQz8&t=3755s](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jA3_PL9KQz8&t=3755s).

<sup>421</sup> Parrish Charitable Foundation, “National Initiative,” 2023, <https://parrishcharitablefoundation.org/initiatives/#nat>; Roland Parish Battle of the Bands, 2023 Invitational and College Expo [website], <https://www.parrishbattleofthebands.com/>.

what the students can do. And then, to continue to show another highlight on what we can present to our community.” Ultimately, his objective has been to, “[build] this thing from the bottom up, trying to show another level of performance for our students to achieve and...to feel comfortable doing what they’re doing, and be recognized for it.”<sup>422</sup>

These events may sway the opinion of Central High School Assistant Band Director, Jaylon Taylor. While he does recognize the value and importance of field shows, Kendrick’s teacher had some vastly different things to say about them. Although he agrees that more time should be spent on field show preparation, J. Taylor is part of a generational shift where stand tunes became prominent because of social media. Occurrences of bands playing in the stands went from not being recorded and posted, to students challenging classmates with their YouTube clip suggestions. When Jaylon was in high school, bands playing in the stands became the preference of many.

I feel like show-style marching band was way more centered around the field show in the past. But now with social media, people wanna have the loudest band [and] the best arrangements. Everybody wants to be an arranger. So they focus more on the stand music and their field shows sound horrible...Me, I’m not a fan of field shows. I understand their true purpose, but I’m not a big field show head. I don’t go on YouTube listening to field shows. I’m a stand head. I grew-up in the generation where I’m playin’ a clip of my favorite band tune to a friend, like it’s my band. And he playin’ one back...Like we havin’ a battle of people’s clips. There was never a field show thing. It’s a cultural thing. Band directors don’t preach field shows now. It’s stand music and popular tunes.<sup>423</sup>

Playing in the stands, in gymnasiums, before or after parades, or while on the football field, are all places, whether battling or not, in which bands play songs that become enjoyable content for bandheads. If events sponsored by USBands want the community support that Prince is seeking, it would be helpful for professional media entities, like Killa Kev, Smash Time

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<sup>422</sup> Passion Is..., “Talk That Talk - Episode 84 I’m At a Loss for Words,” 13:50, 14:11.

<sup>423</sup> J. Taylor, interview with author.

Productions, or Trin.T Productions, to record and post excerpts of shows online. As it is, reaction shows like *Show Style Talk* review field shows, but the “main event,” as they call it, is usually reserved for scoring standstill battles. Consumers enjoy interacting with the panelists via posting statements in the chat or leaving comments after the livestream’s completion. Some shows take donations from cash apps, which determine which bands will be discussed. The *Crucial Conflict* media entity even has award shows that they produce.<sup>424</sup> Additionally, Kendrick Williams mentioned that Instagram is a source of content generated by band personnel in real-time.<sup>425</sup> Parade and field show content is important to bandheads, but it is the standstill content, where many Hip-Hop songs are played, that holds the highest entertainment value for recruiting purposes. Many of these proclivities, like many aspects of the bandworld, fall along conference or deep South versus mid-Atlantic distinctions.

Those who want to be entertained and don’t bind one brand of sounding to Blackness do not see themselves in opposition to the educational mission of band directors, but this doesn’t mean that they completely understand it either. These issues tend to manifest themselves in the summertime activity known as summer band, mass band, or all-star band. It would be unfair to say that students and educators in the Black bandworld who express concerns with ensembles are being elitist, but comments dismissing the educational value of these ensembles were made during a workshop at the 2023 HBCU National Band Directors’ Consortium Convention.<sup>426</sup>

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<sup>424</sup> *Crucial Conflict: Where Legends Collide*, “2nd Annual HBCU Band Awards: A Celebration of Culture and Competition,” video, 05:15:52, YouTube, January 3, 2023, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mCfGvWGMv8E&t=17092s>; *Crucial Conflict: Where Legends Collide*, “2023 MECCA Music Awards,” video, 04:35:03, YouTube, April 30, 2023, [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Y\\_JBqWcEE9A](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Y_JBqWcEE9A).

<sup>425</sup> Williams, interview with author.

<sup>426</sup> Kedric Taylor and James Seda, “Creating a Concert Band in a Marching Band World” (talk and discussion, 2023 HBCU National Band Directors’ Consortium Convention, Georgia International Convention Center, College Park, GA, March 29, 2023).

Summer bands, however, represent what many students and bandheads want: a fun experience in music-making, without having to march, that focuses on popular music. As always, variances in engagement exist, with some high school directors forbidding participation of their students, and others fully involved as arrangers, instructors, or even players.

Summer bands, mass bands, or all-star bands have been mentioned throughout this work because their place in the ecosystem is precarious, but growing, due to members gathering to play music during the summer months, when most secondary and tertiary schools are inactive. The concept started in the early 2000s, with age ranges and activities varying from group to group. The oft-repeated phrase that “band saves lives,” as reported in the *Dallas Morning News*, was meant to raise awareness and support for the 2017 edition of the Dallas Mass Band.<sup>427</sup> This story gives credence to the availability of show-style instruction during the summer months being a positive pursuit in urban communities where activities are not always offered.

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<sup>427</sup> Esteban Bustillos, “‘Band Saves lives’: Orchestrating a sense of purpose for students with Dallas Mass Band,” *Dallas Morning News* [online], July 3, 2017, <https://www.dallasnews.com/arts-entertainment/performing-arts/2017/07/03/band-saves-lives-orchestrating-a-sense-of-purpose-for-students-with-dallas-mass-band/>.



Figure 3.6: Advertisement to join 2022 Austin All-Star Band.

For example, the Austin All-Star Band began with the goal of giving students the opportunity to receive instruction in show-style presentation.<sup>428</sup> When I became aware of this group in 2022, they weren't committed to performing in any field shows, but video evidence displays that during the band's inaugural year in 2005, the ensemble participated in the Alvin Patterson Battle of the Bands and Drumline Competition.<sup>429</sup> It was billed as a pre-Juneteenth field show and drum battle contest, created by Patterson, an esteemed music educator in Austin,

<sup>428</sup> Austin ISD, "Austin ISD All-Star Band," video, 03:01, Facebook, June 18, 2021, <https://www.facebook.com/austinisd/videos/austin-isd-all-star-band/1843451175822941/>.

<sup>429</sup> DallasUrbanAccess, "DFW All Star Band 2005 feat LLI, Memphis, Austin, and Houston All Star Bands," video, 18:17, YouTube, February 5, 2016, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ocDuavQzkgb>.

who happened to be the teacher of trumpeter Kenny Dorham.<sup>430</sup> It would be difficult to argue with the educational and community mission of this group, because of the free cost to join, and because of the types of performances they participate in. Now, Rory Guice is the band director of Northeast Early College High School, which is the only show-style group in the Austin Independent School District (see Figure 3.6). He prepares students from any school in the district, as members of the Austin All-Star Band, for exhibitions, and not contest or drumline battles. The primary performance for students is to march in the Central Texas Juneteenth Parade.<sup>431</sup>

The ire students and educators display are not usually directed toward ensembles in the vein of the Austin All-Star Band, but towards the all-ages programs that I mentioned in Chapter 2. These bands, which may or may not be active from year to year, exist on a separate, loosely organized circuit.<sup>432</sup> While they do occasionally participate in parades, they mostly rehearse tunes strictly for self-sponsored stand battles. Much of the criticism of these groups falls under their propensity to crank, and the presumption that adult players badly influence high school students, due to their paucity of discipline. Jaylon Taylor, a proponent, player, and arranger in mass band, admitted that some of the concerns about the rehearsal etiquette of some older

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<sup>430</sup> Alvin Patterson was a musician and music educator born and raised in Austin, Texas. He is a representative of the lineage of Black band programs, being the student of an educator trained at Tuskegee, and being the teacher of trumpeter Kenny Dorham.

<sup>431</sup> Austin All Star Band, "One of the classics of the Austin All Star Band! We'll see you at the Juneteenth Music Festival - Austin, Texas, this Friday and the Juneteenth Parade this Saturday! Soul Raider Marching Band Austin ISD Austin ISD Fine Arts Raider Northeast Navarro Viking Band Eastside Panther Band," FaceBook, June 13, 2023, [https://www.juneteenthcentraltexas.com/](https://www.facebook.com/permalink.php?story_fbid=pfbid0wH3h3ALS5aAa9dZ7nMQGg4sHmMvLqd8YcHqvai3FZ4nf1hFrNJ21SVXDJqiZEiTyl&id=100063509083239&_cft_[0]=AZXAcuCI1lv48aKNNxw_TNlwMLoW_xVWezqhQlZAj2f3giMcTAFdVFXtyd2cleo5mFUjg_8Hd-tdEnAg4nvSKM8o6T77JrpfAP6_KObxe9IQzTTzIngublYq5t0MxKgy7xDZ4QDjb6a358McKhbKXSyMcHqcUxZnecp6-37a0MF0bdxz-kxju1iFjirwAsk52cZigRKAF_VQdz5gWZcqSD1U9&_tn_=%2CO%2CP-R; Central Texas Juneteenth, <a href=).

<sup>432</sup> For example, the Mississippi Alumni All-Star Band has been inactive for two years, but in 2023 we saw the emergence of the Dallas Legion All-Star Band.

members is merited. In an article on the *Block Us Up* band blog, Ernest Stackhouse Jr. has created a chart of the general pros and cons of summer bands expressed in the discourse (see Table 3.1).<sup>433</sup>

Table 3.1: Pros and Cons table from Stackhouse (2017) blogpost article.

FIVE PROS AND CONS OF ALL STAR/MASS BANDS BY BAND DIRECTORS	
PROS	CONS
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Students continue to play their instruments long after their school's performance calendar has ended.</li> <li>• Adult musicians have an outlet or performance avenue to continue playing and making music.</li> <li>• Promotion of the college band "craft" well beyond the confines of college football.</li> <li>• Opportunity to play a new/different style or genre of music with advanced musicians.</li> <li>• Louisiana Leadership Institute (Lol) - these kids do a lot of things very well! I'd sit through an hour of split tones and intonation just to hear them play.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ruining embouchures and tone by acquiring "bad habits" from the playing style utilized most by these groups.</li> <li>• Emphasis on playing loud above all else with no concept of ensemble cohesion, balance, or blend.</li> <li>• Some believe band camp attendance suffers in some areas due to students participating in mass bands.</li> <li>• Students often participate without permission from their directors and often with school owned instruments.</li> <li>• Mixing of adults/young adults (who have not completed a background check) and young students could be "a liability" for all involved.</li> </ul>

Also, the access to ensemble playing that students have in the summer does not outweigh the detrimental aspects of these groups in some educators' opinions. One of the most hotly contested topics on Stackhouse's chart is the second-to-last bullet point in the con section: "Students often participate without permission from their directors and often with school owned instruments." This is affected by closeness between student and band director in many of these secondary programs. The relationship often resembles a bond between parent and child, with the

<sup>433</sup> Ernest Stackhouse, "Is it Helping or Hurting?: The All-Star/Mass Band," *Block Us Up!* [Blog], June 27, 2017, <https://blockusup.com/2017/06/27/is-it-helping-or-hurting-the-all-starmass-band/>.

band director going above and beyond in students' lives.<sup>434</sup> In short, because of summer band, there are disagreements about educators having the right to control a student's time when they are not in school, or to influence their decision making by issuing ultimatums warning them against joining these ensembles. In the blog text, Stackhouse continues to outline other complaints that he's heard from educators, using the comparison of mumble rappers' effects on Hip-Hop. He claims, "Students return to their campuses with bad musical habits like breaking phrases, overblowing, and overextending their instrument's tessitura by 'taking everything up.' Some directors feel that All-Star/Mass Bands are damaging the culture of HBCU bands similar to what the 'Lil' Rappers' are doing to [Hip-Hop]."<sup>435</sup> Notice that directors cite elements linked to performance practice and altering written arrangements.

Summer bands represent a cross-section of individuals who get to participate in the aesthetically Black band experience regardless of the school they are affiliated with during the fall, or of whether they are adults who want to continue playing their instruments. I observed rehearsals of the Jackson-based Magnolia All-Stars in 2022, and attended the Independent Day Showdown Battle of the Bands competition. This event featured four bands – Magnolia, The Regulators from the Baton Rouge area, The Alabama Mass Band, and the Memphis Mass Band – in multiple rounds of field, stand, and impromptu battles that occurred after the event's supposed completion.<sup>436</sup> For me, it was a Black-affirming space and a highly entertaining affair.

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<sup>434</sup> Mr. Elijah Brimmer Jr. was an alum of the Grambling State Tiger Marching Band, retired band teacher, and cousin to the rapper Juvenile, who had a school named in his honor because of the impact he had on students in the uptown area of New Orleans. <https://www.gram.edu/news/index.php/2022/09/02/efforts-of-alumnus-challenged-inclusion-developed-musicians-inspired-thousands/>.

<sup>435</sup> Ibid.

<sup>436</sup> After the official end of the battle, groups that didn't meet each other in head-to-head contests, including sections, like the drumline or tubas, or even the two individual mellophone players, will continue to play songs, cadences, or even short musical phrases back-and-forth at each other.



Figure 3.7: GAMB at 2023 Battle for the Culture V, in Atlanta, GA.

Most of my research time was spent with the Georgia Mass Band (GAMB) during rehearsals and/or events in 2022 and 2023 (see Figure 3.7). Elijah Thompson and Marcus Cummings founded the Georgia Mass Band Inc., a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization, in 2016.<sup>437</sup> While at JSU, Thompson, Cummings, and then Antonio Alexander and Matthew Buggs felt that Atlanta, then all of Georgia, needed to be represented amongst the different summer bands they noticed.<sup>438</sup> An informal verbal and visual survey of band members shows that the 2023 edition is an amalgamation of students and educators from PWIs, HBCUs, and Atlanta metro-area high schools, who have a mix of corps-style and show-style experience. The band is mostly African

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<sup>437</sup> Stories and Insights, “Meet Elijah Thompson,” *Canvas Rebels* [website], September 19, 2022, <https://canvasrebel.com/meet-elijah-thompson/>.

<sup>438</sup> “Meet Elijah Thompson of Georgia Mass Band in Atlanta,” *VoyageATL* [online magazine], June 12, 2019, <http://voyageatl.com/interview/meet-elijah-thompson-georgia-mass-band-atlanta/>.

American, but just like in many show-style programs, there is a growing Latino presence, with White and Asian-American members included as well. Transnational Blackness is represented with a Jamaican-Canadian who plans to attend Texas Southern, and a clarinetist from the U.S. Virgin Islands who earned her Bachelors of Music Education degree from JSU.

Albany State University musician and GAMB member Evan Garner admitted to being biased against summer band ensembles, until joining in 2021. It was the intricacy of the arrangements, and what he felt was the high level musicianship of the group, that changed his mind:

I used to downplay mass band. I used to say, “Oh mass band? It’s just a band full of bandheads. They don’t even read music for real.” I had to go see for myself, and I stand corrected. The level of music is high. I’m not saying it’s too hard to play, but it’s definitely [up there]. The amount of music you have in such a short period of time to learn...It’s rigorous enough. And it’s challenging, but yet rewarding when you play it.<sup>439</sup>

Possible objections aside, GAMB define themselves as a cranking band. As Elijah Thompson and Evan Garner insisted, and as I heard in person, there is a balance and lushness in their sound that tempers the bite of the aggressiveness with warmth.<sup>440</sup> They also program tunes such as Chick Corea’s “Spain” (1973) and a medley of Harry Potter associated material, such as “Hedwig’s Theme” (2001) and “Fantastic” (2023), from *Hogwarts Legacy* (2023) video game trailer, to stave off criticism of being too fixated on Hip-Hop, which Thompson feels is easier material.<sup>441</sup> Each section works on weaknesses in their technique, in conjunction with the repertoire.

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<sup>439</sup> Evan Garner, interview with the author, October 7, 2022.

<sup>440</sup> Elijah Thompson, discussion with author, June 16, 2022; Garner, interview with author.

<sup>441</sup> Thompson, discussion with author.

As a genre, Hip-Hop is becoming bandworld shorthand for “half notes and whole notes,” i.e., an absence of imagination or musicality in arrangement writing. Stackhouse even produced a list for what he feels is an overused format:

1. Play a current Hip-Hop/Trap song
2. Verse/Chorus into an over-held quarter note
3. Tuba/Drum break
4. Optional – Trombone on eighth notes [trombone break]
5. Verse/Chorus again (repeat as necessary)
6. End on a grossly over-held quarter note
7. All this done as loud as possible<sup>442</sup>

There are summer bands that follow this formula precisely. During the 2023 “Battle for the Culture V: Fifth Quarter Edition,” between GAMB and the New Orleans All-Star Band (NOASB), I heard both groups break the format by using dynamic contrast when playing a variety of selections. Rhetoric directed toward NOASB about their showing in 2022 caused them to make a conscious effort to play more than just Hip-Hop tunes. I thoroughly enjoyed their arrangement of “Grease Is The Word” (1978). This tune is not new to mass band repertoire, because of the 2021 arrangement played by the Michigan Elite Marching Band, but it was still highly effective.<sup>443</sup>

GAMB staff members foster a sense of commitment to the community by sponsoring a band college fair, for high school students, during winter. Collegiate directors are present to audition students and offer scholarships throughout the day to the exceptionally talented instrumentalists they discover. The collegiate fair is one gesture that challenges critics of summer bands. Additionally, Thompson and Cummings tell students to focus on their academics, not just

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<sup>442</sup> Stackhouse, “Is it Helping or Hurting?”

<sup>443</sup> It is always important to acknowledge tunes that have been played by various groups with regards to lineage and studying the similarities and differences in the arrangements.

band, if they want to earn a scholarship.<sup>444</sup> Thoughts shared at the HBCU National Band Directors' Consortium Convention unveiled a disconnect that high schoolers are experiencing with determining the requirements needed to receive admission to college.<sup>445</sup> Many think that a band scholarship will negate a low grade point average or ACT scores, which GAMB members refute.

However, at the same time, GAMB incorporates the not-safe-for-work chant of “A-T-L H\*,” into some of their tunes, as a proclamation of civic pride. It is their catchphrase, but despite its good intention, it can offend some sensibilities. The chant is heard on multiple tunes – used when the band felt they were dominating – shouted during tuba and drum breaks, and seen printed on towels brandished by members. Although it would be intolerable in some spaces, it was seriously engaging and infectious here, with fans becoming excited, dancing, and chanting along with the band when it started. A commonly used tactic with show-style bands, when a tune is effective and resonates with listeners, is to “run it back” after its completion. This means the tune will begin again at a tuba and drum break, as heard at the faux ending of GAMB’s version of “Careful” (2023).<sup>446</sup> On cue, the chant is also included here. As a testament to the yard-neighborhood dynamic, a girl approximately five to seven years old, is engaging in musical play. She is seen standing next to the band waving her hands and bopping to the music, but I couldn’t tell if she was saying the chant or not.

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<sup>444</sup> CW69 Atlanta, “Focus–Atlanta Georgia Mass Band,” *Focus Atlanta* [video excerpt], February 21, 2023, 02:31, <https://www.cbsnews.com/atlanta/video/focus-atlanta-georgia-mass-band/#x>.

<sup>445</sup> Julian Luke, Kuan Mitchell, and Laporsha Dortch, “Talk That Talk – Episode 73 Live from HBCU National Band Directors’ Consortium” (panel discussion, HBCU National Band Directors’ Consortium Convention, Georgia International Convention Center, College Park, GA, April 1, 2023).

<sup>446</sup> A1Media, “GAMB vs NOASB | Battle For The Culture V | Watch in 4K!!!!” video, 50:18, YouTube, June 25, 2023, [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=e\\_bL7HEGTz8&t=896s](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=e_bL7HEGTz8&t=896s).

It's hard to gauge both the entertainment and educational value of summer bands across the board because there isn't a governing body, or set criteria for ensembles, but it's obvious that some groups sound noticeably young and inexperienced. Many educators and students prefer going to the summer band camps conducted by various HBCU bands, like the FAMU camp I mentioned in Chapter 3. High school musicians who want to join these programs play the college-level arrangements, and learn a field show in the style of that band, be it Florida A&M, Jackson State, Tennessee State, Grambling, Southern, or any other HBCU program that offers this experience. Precision Camp, organized by Don P. Roberts and held in Atlanta, is not university specific, but features collegiate clinicians from various institutions. These options are held in higher esteem than summer band for what is thought to be a better educational experience.

It is clear that summer band repertoire, while not being Hip-Hop exclusive, can be Hip-Hop reliant, especially for struggling ensembles that find other selections difficult. Ensembles that find stability from year to year, like GAMB and NOASB, have made it a point to diversify their song selections to help quell complaints against their instructional methods and style of play. Pillars 3 and 4, devoted to ideas expressed in the discourse about the educational facets of band programs being hindered because of the need to entertain, represent an ongoing debate in the African-American bandworld that isn't close to a resolution.

## **Conclusion**

In this chapter, I presented ethnographic and archival data detailing the most prominent themes I found in show-style band culture within four to five years. Rather than using a theoretical approach, my goal has been to present a framing of the raw data and analysis applied to the goings-on within this ecosystem, which is reflective of the culture itself. The four pillars,

split into two sections, were focused on the themes of aggression, battling, education, and entertainment. Cranking was also mentioned, because the historical characteristics of New Orleans brass bands, which play with an assertive, full sound, has influenced many show-style bands. The employment of aural aggressiveness is a mindset cultivated among students, some starting as young as junior high, that helps many of them re-channel this energy positively.

Bands adopt sports and militaristic imagery to play powerfully during battles, which holds high entertainment value for bandheads. Fans like to consume this content, including from social media clips, which creates the need for the ensembles to learn songs at a fast pace. The expectation that junior high or middle school instrumentalists will battle and entertain adults has been scrutinized, but high schoolers typically anticipate these requirements. The educational value of this process is in question for all iterations of ensembles, but especially for summer bands that have mixed-aged membership. Most educators feel that a fully developed school program, with marching band as one component, is a better option than bands performing in the marching ensemble throughout the academic year, regardless of any pushback they get from students, fans, or administrators.

## Chapter 4: REPERTOIRE AND ARRANGING

Banfield writes about the “cultural environments that [give] rise to various traditions,” and the “values, and conventions related to the creation of Black culture/music practices over time”; these are the very facets of musicking that need to be understood to contextualize both the role and method of arrangers and the repertoire they write in the African-American bandworld.<sup>447</sup> He again provides a framework to study HBCU band culture, where staff and student arrangers are extremely important, because it is through their lens that we can substantially interrogate the meaning of Hip-Hop as repertoire, and the type of skills and creativity needed when transforming it into band music. These are the musicians who, at one time, had to listen to the radio with a pencil and manuscript paper handy in order to transcribe melodic, harmonic, and rhythmic ideas of the popular songs of the day, just to get a skeleton of what was needed to complete an arrangement, and who now use technical knowledge of music notation or music production software to write the band arrangements.

In this chapter, I introduce the role of an arranger in the HBCU bandworld. Most HBCU bands pride themselves on formulating their own sonic identity and aesthetic through repertoire choices and custom-made arrangements of songs, but it is rare to hear arrangers’ perspectives about how they handle this task. First, I interrogate the depiction of Hip-Hop by arrangers and bandheads, which is ambiguous, and hear explanations about what situations dictate a Hip-Hop arrangement to be written (stand tune, drill tune, majorette/color guard tune, dance routine/dance block). I provide a lengthy media analysis of two performances by the Norfolk State University

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<sup>447</sup> William C. Banfield, *Cultural Codes: Makings of a Black Music Philosophy* (Lanham: The Scarecrow Press, 2010), 83.

Spartan Legion as an example, because of the imaginative ways they decide Hip-Hop should be incorporated into presentation and show design.

Next, I turn to the lucrative music publishing industry. Current Black commercial music was once rejected by major sheet music publishing companies, but the universal appeal these songs now enjoy has prompted Hal Leonard, and other publishing houses, to ask their staff arrangers to write these tunes. Hal Leonard has tapped a few arrangers from the Don P. Roberts *DRUMLine Live* stage production, but actors in the Black bandworld feel there is some hypocrisy here. Show-style bands are given a low reputation in mainstream circles, but now that a more diverse student population wants to play these tunes, the music that was once rejected is now being coveted. Additionally, most of the arrangers at publishing houses who are on staff are unfamiliar with techniques that are unique to show-style aesthetics, which is an argument Marie A. Douglas presents. It is a case of appropriating the unique values and conventions of Black cultural output, which Banfield alludes to, without including the community from which it derives in the business venture. However, if a dilution of the original product is also more marketable, the situation is understandable. I briefly look into the tune “Industry Baby” (2021) to illustrate my point.

The importance of band arrangers as de facto composers to fulfill the need to compose new musical material in rap tunes is a fairly new phenomenon, and is a practice in dispute. A common complaint about Hip-Hop arrangements is that they are formulaic; in particular, the trombone break, also mentioned briefly in Chapter 3, is a compositional device that is distinctly maligned. Generational differences influence feelings that need to be explained with some subtlety. Elder arranger Lindsey Sarjeant is firmly against composing new material. Trenton Hunter, in his 30s, knows that such compositions can be unimaginative if care is not taken. He

was generous enough to explain some of his methodology for writing interesting trombone breaks, which I discuss in detail. Evan Garner, a student at Albany State, a GAMB member, and a developing arranger, is firmly in favor of the device, but is still searching for his compositional voice.

I investigate general methodologies in pedagogy that replenishes the well in the ecosystem with new arrangers. A college-level arranging class is available to some, but I found that there is a gamut of methods that arrangers have used to acquire knowledge and receive feedback. There are situations where student arrangers received direct instruction from their band director, like Jaylon Taylor instructing Kendrick Williams at Central High School, or others who received passive encouragement like TxSU's Trenton Hunter. Many resort to autodidactic methods, like Marie A. Douglas's use of band method books to learn transpositions, or when current high schoolers use free, browser-based notation software to arrange what they hear. Again, generational lines are drawn because many young arrangers are not studying theory and counterpoint in the manner that experienced writers feel enables the inexperienced to write a variety of tunes. All who are serious about arranging communicated that applying theory and listening to feedback is the key to improving.

Lastly, I focus on a subculture within the bandworld, and cover the different systems in place that are utilized for the creation of percussion parts for the arrangements. In the history of the marching arts in general, percussion has been viewed as a problem area because of Eurocentric attitudes that devalue these instruments and the students who play them. In the Black bandworld, I investigate a spirit of collaboration between band directors, arrangers (if the directors are not writing the brass and woodwind material themselves), and percussionists, who usually create the percussion parts through a series of methods. However, it is necessary to

interrogate the balance between using the ear to create parts and requiring students to read music. Furthermore, I investigate the different approaches of working that lead to successful part-writing.

It is imperative to define these circumstances as extraordinary in Black music, because the level of comprehension of who arrangers are, what they do, and the cultural cache they hold in the Black bandworld is opposite to what occurs in Black commercial music in the general populace. These are the specific values and conventions that Banfield has mentioned when establishing parameters for innovative studies in Black music. Instead of being ignored as they are in the commercial music world, arrangers in the African-American bandworld are exalted to the point where, as Jaylon Taylor reported earlier, everybody wants to be one.

### **An Arranger's Choice: When and Whether to Hip-Hop or Not**

Commercial music arrangers have always occupied a key place in music, but often as contributors invisible to the public. Charles Stepney occupied various roles in the commercial music industry – vibraphonist, producer, jingle writer – but the one he is most known for amongst musicians is as an arranger. If you ask Stevie Wonder, Chaka Khan, or Elton John, they will all rave about his incredible and identifiable writing skills that came to their attention with his Rotary Connection albums.<sup>448</sup> Pianist Ramsey Lewis, for whom Stepney wrote regularly, tells us of his ability to intricately write and orchestrate scores with or without a piano, “like he was writing a letter.”<sup>449</sup> His work with Rotary Connection, Lewis, Minnie Ripperton, and especially his writing, production, and songwriting credits with Earth, Wind, and Fire may have made his

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<sup>448</sup> Alexis Petridis, “‘What He Was Doing Was Like Nothing Else’: The Secret Recordings of Genius Producer Charles Stepney,” *The Guardian* [online], September 1, 2022, <https://www.theguardian.com/music/2022/sep/01/charles-stepney-secret-genius-producer-soul>.

<sup>449</sup> Ayana Contreras, “Charles Stepney Built Lasting Cathedrals Inside Black Music,” *Reader* [Chicago online version], August 16, 2022, <https://chicagoreader.com/music/charles-stepney-built-lasting-cathedrals-inside-black-music/>.

name prominent with Black audiences, but this is unclear. Arrangers in the music industry are usually obscured, and most people are unaware of the work arrangers do when making recordings.

In contrast to this trend, staff and student arrangers in HBCU band culture are well-known individuals. If you ask bandheads about the names Brian Simmons, Larry Jenkins, or Paul I. Adams, they are aware of arrangements they have written for bands on various levels. If a new arrangement is well received, people always want to know who the writer is. These musicians pride themselves on helping bands formulate their own sound and aesthetic through these custom-made arrangements. With the complex and contradictory depiction of Hip-Hop penetrating the bandworld, trying to understand the genre from the arranger's vantage point is necessary to ascertain how exactly it can be used, and the techniques needed to make it viable for bands to play. In this section, I explore the rationale or function certain pieces of repertoire serve for bands. Hip-Hop arrangements are used situationally in band presentations, but the arranger must consider the practical reasons for writing the tunes, in addition to the possible entertainment value they hold for listeners.

Hip-Hop was once thought of as a contemptuous inclusion by band directors because they thought it to be unmusical. In "Show Design and Wind arranging for Marching Ensembles," a thesis written by John Michael Brennan, he suggests, and notes that it is suggested in the literature, that commercial music may be a challenging choice when deciding upon repertoire. In his opinion, "Some popular music selections do not adapt well for a marching ensemble. With the greater influence of special electronic effects and lyrics being spoken on angle pitch, it becomes much more difficult to adapt those styles of songs for marching band."<sup>450</sup> What he is

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<sup>450</sup> John Michael Brennan, "Show Design and Wind Arranging for Marching Ensembles," (master's thesis, Ohio State University, 2014), 47.

doing here is claiming that Hip-Hop and R&B are inadequate as band repertoire without naming them specially, but instead describing his interpretation of their sound and processes. The fact that the music is constructed electronically is given as one excuse to ignore it, which negates the palette of Marie A. Douglas, Evan Garner, and Kendrick Williams, who all apply their background in music production to the arranging skills.<sup>451</sup> Much of the literature Brennan reviews also questions the effectiveness of Black commercial music for band, even when rock music is included as a possible choice. While some HBCU arrangers agree with these opinions, show-style arrangers cannot make assumptions as Brennan does – that his target audience is uninterested in Hip-Hop and therefore it needn't be referenced.

Examples of show-style bands incorporating Hip-Hop can be traced as far back as the early 1980s. As Southern Hip-Hop became more prominent in the popular sphere, the underlying premise of band music becoming Black genre weakened arrangers' resistance to Hip-Hop being used outside of the dance block, as all sounds emanating from Black spaces became usable material. Ben Ratcliff, a reporter for the *New York Times*, wrote as far back as 2007 that he noticed a merger between band and Hip-Hop because of the number of artists who wanted to perform or record with the ensembles. Ratcliff may have been late to notice the symbiotic relationship between Hip-Hop and HBCU culture when authoring his report. Nevertheless, he wrote that, "Since Southern [Hip-Hop] blew up commercially around 2001, the influence has started to go the other way. Now popular culture seems to be feeding off the bands. Dozens of rappers and pop performers, including Kanye West, OutKast, and the Ying Yang Twins, have recorded or performed with HBCU marching bands [since the mid-2000s]."<sup>452</sup>

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<sup>451</sup> Brennan, "Show Design and Wind Arranging," 36.

<sup>452</sup> Ben Ratcliff, "Where The Game Is Just a Warm-up for the Band," *New York Times*, September 8 2007, <https://search-proquest-com.proxy-remote.galib.uga.edu/central/docview/848093319/fulltextPDF/6A6A76FB92ED4A76PQ/16?accountid=14537>.

In a discussion about Black band culture between Sir Foster (Foster Carson) and Black Studies scholar Regina N. Bradley, a counter narrative to Hip-Hop's ineffectiveness as band material is provided. The two, with the other podcast host Christina Lee, explored the connections between show-style bands and Hip-Hop as a source of repertoire and style for ensembles. Bradley and Foster were both exposed to this in high school, because Bradley was introduced to OutKast via a band member arranging one of their tunes for a future performance. Foster was a band musician and fledgling arranger on the high school level, with a HBCU alum as a band director. He has gone on to use his musical skills to become the organist for the NBA franchise Atlanta Hawks and the arena and stadium DJ for University of Georgia Athletics. His performance of Hip-Hop during NBA games, especially when playing songs created by artists in Atlanta, has brought him notoriety in the entertainment world.<sup>453</sup> His time as a band member in high school and a bandhead in college set the tone for his game-time instrumental interpretations of Hip-Hop tunes. The conversation he has with Bradley displays a level of understanding about this Hip-Hop-to-band connection that is typical for a person immersed in the yard-neighborhood dynamic from an early age:

Sir Foster: The band can be cutting edge at times. If something comes on the radio and it's hot, within three weeks you can expect to hear a band play it...I think the earliest example that I can say is "Who Run It" [2011] by Three 6 Mafia. My band director went to a HBCU so they did a Battle of the Bands in Macon, Georgia, which is thirty minutes away from Fort Valley, Georgia...They [also] brought FAMU to that Battle of the Bands...FAMU actually came and they went on the field and played...Three 6 Mafia. So I was in high school at the time and I was starting to write band arrangements. When I heard that, I actually went home and...wrote a band arrangement for my high school band. And then, I...did a transition into "Number One Stunna" by the Big Tymers...

Regina N. Bradley: High School bands are such a significant part of the HBCU tradition too, because that's where you get your recruits from. What is it, do you think, about Southern Hip-Hop that resonates so deeply with HBCUs?

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<sup>453</sup> Sarah Kogod, "How a Broke Musician Became the Best Organist in Sports," SB Nation [online], March 11, 2015, <https://www.sbnation.com/nba/2015/3/11/8183201/sir-foster-profile-atlanta-hawks-organist>.

Foster: HBCU bands play what the audience that goes there is listening to. HBCU bands are extremely connected to Black culture. Whatever is hot at the time, we might have band shirts with those phrases on them. Those might be the new chants the band is making. And the band is gonna play the hot songs. We know what songs are classic to us. Maybe it didn't go number one on the charts... We know what songs, that there's always a certain dance to, a certain step to... Now rap... is more at the forefront of the HBCU repertoire. Basically because that is where Black music is now.<sup>454</sup>

In October 2022, the *Wall Street Journal* and *Billboard* reported that although growth was slowing, Hip-Hop music, or its derivatives trap or rap, still had the highest number of streams from American listeners.<sup>455</sup> Even so, the amount of Hip-Hop that should be used by bands and their reception is nebulous because of the mixed messaging from within the bandworld. There are different opinions expressed about Hip-Hop – sometimes with contradictory statements presented by the same person.

Jackson State has gained a reputation for using Hip-Hop for copious amounts of stand tunes. Claire Milburn obliged the many questions I asked about her experience with Hip-Hop while she was a member of Norfolk's Spartan Legion, and then, JSU's Sonic Boom:

Kevin Green: How did Hip-Hop fit in with the other repertoire you played?

Claire Milburn: [We] played more marches at JSU, which was surprising. We had a lot of rap tunes in both bands because that was what the crowd wanted to hear. All of our parade tunes and drill tunes were older... 70s, 80s music. There was widespread generationally.

Green: When was the Hip-Hop played? How was it incorporated into performances?

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<sup>454</sup> Regina N. Bradley and Christina Lee, Ep. 9, "Welcome to the Sir Foster Show: A BOTM Extended Play," March 29, 2020, in *Bottom of The Map*, produced by Floyd Hall, podcast, MP3 audio, 03:53, <https://beta.prx.org/stories/299061>.

<sup>455</sup> Neil Shah, "Hip-Hop Is the Hottest Music of the Streaming Era. Is It Now Cooling Down?" *Wall Street Journal* [online], October 1, 2022, <https://www.wsj.com/articles/hip-hop-streaming-era-slowdown-11664572115>; Insanul Ahmed, "Is Hip-Hop's Dominance Slipping? 'My Concern Is the Magic Is Gone'," *Billboard Pro* [online], October 18, 2022, <https://www.billboard.com/pro/hip-hop-music-most-popular-genre-dominance-slipping/>.

Milburn: At Jackson State, the Zero Quarter was the biggest display of popular music. People don't want to hear a lot of technicality, people want to hear something that grabs their attention and something that's powerful at the beginning of the game. We didn't really do a Zero quarter in the MEAC. [At JSU], if it was during the game... and only had a minute to play a song, we would play a lot more Hip-Hop and rap tunes because they're shorter. The crowd gets excited by that.

Green: What was the audience reaction to Hip-Hop?

Milburn: I felt that was what they look for the most, in both [locations], but especially in Jackson.

Green: What was the attitude of the directors towards Hip Hop?

Milburn: I felt the directors on both staffs liked the music that we played. They did not want that to be the majority of what we played. Especially at Norfolk. It's a different style of playing on the East Coast...[In Jackson], (Dr.) Mr. Little would advise the student arrangers, "Typically your first song needs to be a rap tune because that's what the students are going to buy into." During his era, if the students didn't like it, the band wasn't gonna to play it. He said, "You need to do something that's going to be really popular that the students can grab onto, and then you can pass out other stuff, and they'll trust you." [Purple Lamborghini] was the first song and the only song while I was there that got passed out, but the students really liked it. It was the simplest song that I passed out to them, but it was the one that they liked the most.<sup>456</sup>

The arrangement she was speaking of was "Purple Lamborghini" (2016) by Skrillex and Rick Ross. Skrillex is technically labeled a dubstep producer, but as stated earlier, the ubiquitousness of Hip-Hop production styles has driven pop music frequencies lower and increased the general volume of tracks, regardless of the genre nomenclature attached. The original, created for a car chase scene in the *Suicide Squad* (2016) feature film, displays a sinister bassline constructed with TR-808 kick timbres transformed into definitive pitch.

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<sup>456</sup> Claire Milburn, interview with author, August 2, 2020.



Figure 4.1: “Purple Lamborghini” main riffs.

Meanwhile, in a video showing a 2016 5th Quarter battle between Jackson State and Alabama State, we see that Claire took the main melodic riff heard on top of the 808 bassline and moved it around to different instruments in her version (Figure 4.1).<sup>457</sup> The trombones fill up the harmony with long tones divided into triads, with the baritones utilizing a unison long tone voiced in their upper range. These factors, plus the rhythmic interplay between the two sections, help the trombones to be felt in the background, while the baritones stand out more as a countermelody to the main riff. The trombone would critically be called “half notes and whole notes,” even if the note durations aren’t exactly that. This derogatory distinction has come to signify bands’ playing repertoires that are thought to be simplistic, and is usually levied against groups accused of performing too many Hip-Hop arrangements.

In his review of the 2022 edition of the Boombox Classic Battle of the Bands, *Show Style Talk* moderator and Human Jukebox alum Jerome Law is well-enough versed in band culture to

<sup>457</sup> Lamik 4000, “Jackson State ‘Purple Lamborghini’ vs ASU 2016,” video, 02:29, YouTube, November 6, 2016, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nMsa89pdLYQ>.

issue a warning. While watching a battle that he felt had used Hip-Hop abundantly, he warned viewers that, “If you get in a rap battle, Jackson State will get you every time.”<sup>458</sup> Jackson State has gained a reputation for relying on Hip-Hop tunes excessively. A brief analysis, using video recordings posted by band content provider A1 Media, includes song and artist identification tags. Although this is an estimation, because of the genre blurring that occurs when rappers use auto-tune, I found that six out of twelve songs that JSU played were Hip-Hop tunes. For Southern, the number was nine out of thirteen. Commenters from the show still accused JSU of being too reliant on rap tunes:

Diary of a Lady Band Director: too many rap tunes. At least re-invent the formula

Durrell Parker: JSU played rap tunes most of the night

Brandon Ambrose: Anybody notice Jackson got by with rap songs?

Mariojackson: Been playing rap tunes for a long time

Zach C: This was a lowkey a rap battle [to be honest]

Payton B.: It was over when SU played a ballad and Jackson responded with some Glorilla [in my arrogant opinion]<sup>459</sup>

Opinions vary to a point where it can be difficult to get a read on the true feelings of practitioners and listeners. Adding to the inconsistency, I have heard all manner of songs, excluding Hip-Hop, be called “real music,” “music-music,” or “actual music,” even by those who embrace the use of Hip-Hop and favor Hip-Hop arrangements. Porsha Dortch is not one who is enamored with the amount of Hip-Hop being played for musical or practical concerns. As

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<sup>458</sup> Show Style Talk, “Show Style Talk ‘Band Podcast’ - (11-2-22) Boombox Classic, Magic City Classic, Homecoming, etc...,” video, 02:23:57, YouTube, November 2, 2022, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ptYJK1KQUNI&t=11s>.

<sup>459</sup> Comments, “Show Style Talk ‘Band Podcast’ - (11-2-22) Boombox Classic, Magic City Classic, Homecoming, etc...,” <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ptYJK1KQUNI&t=11s>.

the Silkette flag coordinator, she is also searching for adequate feature tunes for the squad. She offers, “I don’t mean no harm, but it ain’t much in these [rap arrangements]. So if you want your band to have any music, you got to play something else... We have to look to the past, because these new people ain’t given us nothin to work with.”<sup>460</sup> A comment in the chat also says that looking for older material would be better.

HunitSquad01: I think the music has apt to do with it. Arrangers are writing for this new music which isn’t as “musical” as the 80s and 90s and even early 2000s so everything sounds alike... Arrangers take the easy way out by writing these new songs (which is good) instead of searching for those old gems<sup>461</sup>

A different perspective is offered from reactor and content creator KBThaBandhead, on the same episode of *Talk That Talk*. He had communicated with patrons attending or viewing band events surrounding the 2022 Bayou Classic. The yearly Grambling versus Southern football game features a standstill battle in the New Orleans Superdome the evening prior to Saturday’s game. He offered that, “A lot of people said the Bayou Classic was boring because they played so many ballads and not rap tunes,” which supports the notion that the level of engagement bands should have with Hip-Hop is not agreed upon amongst bandheads.<sup>462</sup>

What KB may not realize is that many students in the band themselves feel that Hip-Hop is overrepresented in the book. When I spoke with Albany State Band member Janiya A.

Charlton, she disclosed a preference for R&B and funk:

Kevin Green: How is Hip-Hop used in [Albany State’s] Band?

Janiya A. Charlton: From my experience, it is literally everything we play. Minus the school hymn, the pep tunes, and “I’m So Glad,” almost everything is a rap song.

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<sup>460</sup> Passion Is..., “Talk That Talk - Episode 59 So Much to Discuss: Where Do We Begin?!” video, 01:41:18, YouTube, November 30, 2022, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hV8oTZq0cn8>.

<sup>461</sup> Comment, “Talk That Talk - Episode 59 So Much to Discuss: Where Do We Begin?!” <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hV8oTZq0cn8>.

<sup>462</sup> Ibid.

Green: In your estimation do you feel that [there's] an overabundance [or] just about right?

Charlton: It's an overabundance.

Green: So, if you had a choice, what other tunes would you try to integrate?

Charlton: I would try and integrate a little more R&B. A little more funk. I'm partial to funk. I like it. I like it when bands play it. It's written for bands. They normally have band parts. It's very easy to adapt, in my opinion.<sup>463</sup>

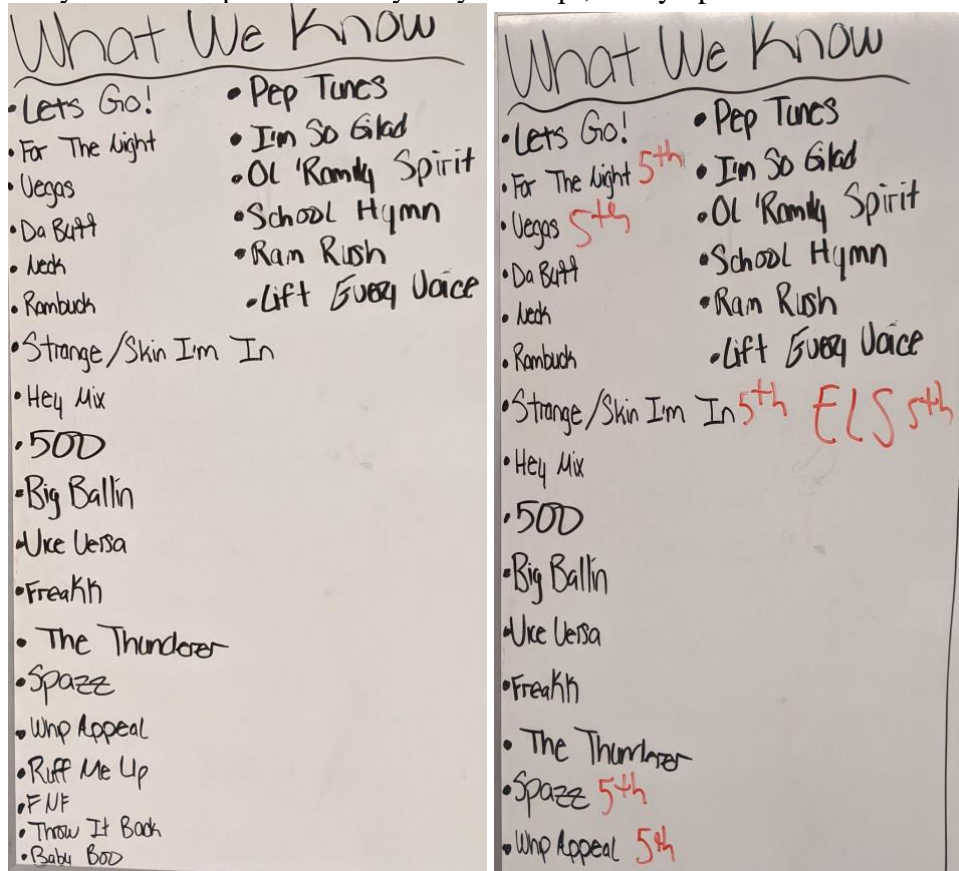


Figure 4.2: Albany State tune choices (left). Figure 4.3: 5th Quarter designations added (right).

The two photos in Figures 4.2 and 4.3 indicate performance-ready tunes for Albany State University Band students as of October 1, 2022. Songs listed in the right column of each picture

<sup>463</sup> Janiya A. Charlton, interview with author, September 30, 2022.

are the pep tunes Janiya referenced. All HCBUs play some version of these tunes and they are heard throughout the year during every season. The tunes listed in the left picture (Figure 4.2) are current tunes they must choose from, and the red “5th,” in the picture on the right (Figure 4.3), indicates repertoire choices for the 5th Quarter battle against Miles College after the game.

Again, what is or isn’t considered Hip-Hop is debatable. The vocal melodic material created by Pop Smoke in “For the Night” (2020) and Lil Baby in “Spazz” (2018) is not centered in Black church-derived, R&B vocal technique. These songs employ an auto-tune assisted rap/sung style of vocalization, that is either monotone, or perhaps uses two to three pitches at the most. This is heard in conjunction with Doja Cat singing and rapping in a traditional style in the song “Vegas” (2022), which can be easily labeled as Hip-Hop. Regardless of this genre blurring, the arranging style that writers use for these tunes is different from that used in “Whip Appeal” (1989) and the “Strange/Skin I’m In” (1984/1988) medley also listed on the board, which clearly represent the R&B and funk that Janiya would like to hear more of.

The differences in opinion I have shown thus far are defined by tunes written for the stands or used in battles, or perhaps in field show auxiliary features. For the most part, Hip-Hop used during field shows was embraced cross-generationally quite early on, because of the imaginative ways it was applied. FAMU alum Maurice LeFlore shared that the Marching 100 incorporated the song “Planet Rock” (1982), by Afrika Bambaataa and the Soul Sonic Force (produced by Arthur Baker), into a marching drill music medley as early as 1982.<sup>464</sup> Not all HBCUs feature their drumline during field shows, but North Carolina A&T’s Cold Steel Drumline’s features have gained a reputation of being one of the highlights of their shows. In their 2022 season, they used a combination of thematic material from “Planet Rock,” plus

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<sup>464</sup> Maurice LeFlore, interview with author; Hhorns2002, “FAMUs Marching 100,” video, 02:00, YouTube, March 17, 2006, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8ufG4ggK3wo>.

Debbie Deb's freestyle classic "When I Hear Music" (1983), as the foundation for their drum feature.<sup>465</sup>

The Spartan Legion, from Norfolk State University, created a stir in January 2023 that resonated beyond followers of marching bands, because the events they performed for were part of the 133rd Tournament of Roses Parade festivities, in Pasadena, California. The consensus in the Black bandworld was that they positively showcased HBCU show-style bands on the largest stage imaginable, in the best possible manner. This included Hip-Hop being representative of music that is to be expressed and embraced through marching arts presentation.

The field show NSU executed during the Remo Bandfest showcase was centered around the New Jack Swing sound pioneered by the producer Teddy Riley in the late 1980s. This style is a Hip-Hop/R&B/Go-Go hybrid, that does in fact have a swing feel, and may include singing or rapping vocal contributions. Choosing this music allowed for the feel of Hip-Hop to be present throughout the show, via the rhythmic material, but spoke to 1990s nostalgia with the harmonic and melodic content. When I attended this performance in person, I found myself singing along to thematic material. Norfolk's show began with a Riley-influenced groove-based drum feature, before starting their first selection with an HBCU band staple, "I'm Dreamin'" (1991) by Christopher Williams, with the acapella vocal breakdown of "Motownphilly" (1991) added to the arrangement. "Just Got Paid" (1987) and the Jimmy Jam and Terry Lewis produced "Alright" (1989), were used as music for the Hot Ice dance team. "Don't Leave Me" (1997), a ballad by Blackstreet, served as music for the Silks' flag feature.

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<sup>465</sup> Finesse productions, "NCA&T Blue & Gold Marching Machine @ Gotham City 2022," video, 03:49, YouTube, October 17, 2022, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Dl-QENZhIsc>; "Freestyle" is a subgenre of music coming from Miami and New York in the 1980s, which featured up-tempo BPMs, TR-808 and synth timbres, and R&B-styled vocals. The moniker of "Latin Freestyle" was given to much of the music being made in New York because both artists and fans were English speaking Puerto Ricans.

Hip-Hop as the basis for the dance routine/dance block has been a long-standing tradition with HBCUs, because as Sir Foster has explained, they are meant to capture either the most contemporary trends in Black vernacular dance, or once-popular dances, used to acknowledge popular styles of the past. Dance blocks are not executed the same way by all schools. Grambling believes in the whole band playing while dancing during a portion of their block. SU elects to place their instruments on the ground when dancing, while Jackson State does not, but both schools depend on the percussion and tuba sections to play most of the musical content. Norfolk, Howard, and Albany State fully include their auxiliary teams into the dance block, while I have only noticed that tactical choice in the SWAC with the addition of FAMU to the conference.

During the Bandfest, NSU began with the theme to the 1990s sketch comedy show “In Living Color” (1990), which was performed by the deceased rapper Heavy-D, when forming the block. The actual dancing started with another hit produced by Riley, Guy’s “Groove Me” (1988). Other songs performed were “Now That We Found Love” (1991) and “Rub You the Right Way” (1990), before they ended with TLC’s “What About Your Friends” (1992).

The Rose Parade itself is watched by millions of people throughout the world, and the Spartan Legion made a huge impression when playing their “California Mix” during a standstill presentation in front of the parade Grandstand. As head drum major Jaylon Jackson told *Andscape* media outlet:

We’re marching down the street, playing our few songs, and then as soon as we get to the corner [of Orange Grove and Colorado Boulevards], you just see cameras and people everywhere... The band has been working on this corner for a month or two now. But as soon as we turn that corner and we see all these cameras, everybody in the stands all the way at the top, it just puts me in a new

world because I haven't seen that many people all on one corner or in one area at a time, especially not for a parade. It was just awe-inspiring.<sup>466</sup>

Norfolk's "California Mix," like the "Missy Elliot Mix" the band played for the artist in Virginia in October of 2022, is a series of mostly Hip-Hop motivic material, arranged in a DJ-styled cohesive mix, that the ensemble performs in a hybrid dance block/parade formation. The arrangement featured excerpts of "Let's Get It Started" (2004) by the Black-Eyed Peas, and a lesser known song outside of African-American circles called "California" (2015) by Colonel Loud, which samples heavily from "We Are One" (1983) by Frankie Beverly and Maze. The arguable highlight was Dr. Dre and 2Pac's "California Love" (1995). Parade hosts Yarel Ramos and Roberto Hernández from the Univision Broadcast might agree, as they were singing and dancing along with the band while on camera.<sup>467</sup> Of the many kind things they said, they described NSU as "increíble" (incredible).

The Spartan Legion has shown imaginative use of Hip-Hop references in arrangements written for shows, but still plays Hip-Hop written as stand music as well. As an ensemble, they are disproving claims as to the limitations of Hip-Hop by those within and outside of the Black bandworld. It is a fairly recent phenomenon for bands outside of the ecosystem to be heard playing Black commercial music. They may be acquiescing to students who are familiar with the repertoire, or a PWI collegiate program that has hired an HBCU alum, as Louisiana State University, Pennsylvania State University, and Florida State University have done for their ensembles.

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<sup>466</sup> Darren A. Nichols, "For Norfolk State, Rose Parade Marks 'Biggest Performance in Band History,'" *Andscape* [online media], January 11, 2023, <https://andscape.com/features/for-norfolk-state-rose-parade-marks-biggest-performance-in-band-history/>.

<sup>467</sup> Univision Los Angeles, "EN VIVO: Rose Parade 2023," video, 01:06:44, YouTube, January 2, 2023, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NH8i9HcXIw&t=4028s>.

This situation has generated commentary, but it is different from major sheet music publishing companies selling HBCU-style arrangements. Attitudes expressed about this aren't completely negative. When I asked Jaylon Taylor if he had seen these stock arrangements, he answered that he had, but also voiced some reservations. He stated, "They make them very accessible to a lot of different bands. I can't say you jackin' our culture and taking our style, but for y'all to talk so bad about us...y'all still try to make money off of it." His problem was not with the arrangements themselves, but with the fact that mainstream band culture is benefiting financially from a repertoire that they initially disdained.

Popular repertoire used as stand tunes is generally not taken as seriously at PWIs and corps-style high schools. Many of these bands read tunes in stands, as opposed to memorizing them, and they seek easy arrangements that can be sight-read or played without having to rehearse for prolonged periods of time. This ethos is not just applied to stock arrangements of tunes popularized via show-style bands, but across the board. For show-style bands, the charts themselves are not all that hold value; it is the understanding that all repertoire is to be approached seriously, so the arrangements performed needed to reflect that. As Marie A. Douglas asserts, the quality of the charts varies depending on who's writing, and if those individuals are "in touch with the culture" or not.

I lean heavily on her expertise here. Douglas, as a composer, arranger for band and commercial music projects, music theorist, and educator, is an impeccable source of information. She agrees with Jaylon Taylor in suggesting that alterations to the style have been made, but also provides her estimation of the rationale behind it:

I think they do tend to be watered down and... missing a lot of the important aspects of the music. Because they're trying to make it approachable for them. Palatable for another demographic...Instead of embracing the culture that it comes from and learning from that culture, they make it palatable for people. I

believe that comes from all these years of our Black composers, men and women, writing...Western Art Music, and it being hidden, we've not been able to have...not until now...not having our sounds justified, and placed into some education scenario where people are looking at it like it's art. And not like... [Marie makes a face and sound of disapproval]... "I wouldn't have done that. I wouldn't have did that either."<sup>468</sup>

In her discussion of the depiction of arranging techniques, Black aesthetics, and non-standard practices in music, Marie's assertions are justified. Horace Tapscott, the pianist, arranger, and community activist, recalled facing this issue when attending Los Angeles City College after graduating from high school in 1952. He had gotten dismissed from a collegiate big band that was a feeder ensemble for Stan Kenton and Woody Herman, after improvising a solo instead of playing the written one. While drawing upon training acquired from his high school environment and private instructor, or in this circumstance, valuing the ear as much as the eye, his ability to use solfège for transcribing material without a piano was considered suspicious by his harmony teacher. After the same instructor dismissed Duke Ellington's *Black, Brown, and Beige* (1943), because he insisted that Ellington's doubling of thirds and use of parallel fifths were against the rules of written music set by composers like J.S. Bach, Tapscott left the institution.<sup>469</sup> Marie and I are both aware of an unfortunate, historical pattern that occurs in Black musicking. We know that culture emanating from our community can initially be rejected, then eventually desired, but not in its rawest and original form. This results in arrangements that are supposed to be representative of show-style repertoire, not actually being reflective of the sound of these bands.

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<sup>468</sup> Marie A. Douglas, interview with author, March 24, 2023.

<sup>469</sup> Horace Tapscott and Steven Louis Isoardi, *Songs of the Unsung: The Musical and Social Journey of Horace Tapscott*, ed. Steven Louis Isoardi (Durham: Duke University Press, 2001), 41, <https://doi.org/10.1515/9780822383185>.

The song “Industry Baby” by Lil Nas X is a good example of this, because of the overwhelming popularity of the tune across demographics. It was played in all types of situations, by HBCUs, PWIs, and corps-style and show-style secondary programs, including as an atypical parade piece.<sup>470</sup> The nucleus of the song was a series of trombone horn loops created by musician and writer Nick Lee, and was shaped into a complete track with trombonist multitracking live horn parts over the production work of Take A Day Trip and Kanye West.<sup>471</sup> Although it is unclear from evidence if Lil Nas X spent time in a show-style group as a high school band member, he is attracted to horn sounds nonetheless, and the fact that he is from the metro Atlanta area puts him in proximity to the Black bandworld.<sup>472</sup> Lee, from Southern California, was involved in school music, but not marching band. Yet, through the collaborative efforts of all involved, including some direction from Lil Nas X himself, the brass foundation of the track was constructed to heighten confidence in the listener. When Take a Day Trip producer, Denzel Baptiste expounds about the recording session and a live performance of the song at the 2021 MTV Video Music Awards, he links its arrangement to HBCU marching bands, stating,

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<sup>470</sup> March tempo is set at 120 BPM, which dictates what tunes are feasible for parade performance. Students can be seen executing a double time march in relation to the tempo; Robert Eagle Staff Middle School Marching Band, “2022 RESMS Marching Ravens | ‘Industry Baby’ by @lilnasx @ 2022 Grand Daffodil Parades - Puyallup,” video, 02:08, YouTube, April 10, 2022, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fSUnbevVfZI>.

<sup>471</sup> Callie Ahlgrim, “2 Songs From Lil Nas X’s Album Were Partially Inspired by Shrek. Meet the Producer Behind ‘Industry Baby’ and ‘Dolla Sign Slime,’” *Insider* [online], September 21, 2021, <https://www.insider.com/lil-nas-x-industry-baby-dolla-sign-slime-horns-producer-nick-lee-2021-9>; Takeadaytrip, “INDUSTRY BABY!!! 100% REAL HORNS: NICK LEE Prod. DAYTRIP & KANYE WEST,” Instagram, July 23, 2021, [https://www.instagram.com/reel/CRrqv6nlx9Q/?utm\\_source=ig\\_web\\_copy\\_link](https://www.instagram.com/reel/CRrqv6nlx9Q/?utm_source=ig_web_copy_link).

<sup>472</sup> Evidence shows that the cultural issues that plague marching band may have been in play at Lithia Springs High School in Douglas County Georgia. The school has a high population of African-American students, who are mainly interested in show-style band, but the teachers being hired, until recently, were all versed in corps-style presentation. The ensemble was small and sounded inexperienced, but this may change with the new director, who is an alum of Bethune-Cookman. <http://lshsband.blogspot.com/>. <https://www.facebook.com/LithiaSpringsHSBand/>. <https://www.linkedin.com/in/maximilian-jeanbrice-59928415a>.

“There’s a certain way that HBCU band horn sections play that is specific for the way the music is arranged.”<sup>473</sup>

These “certain ways” that Baptiste is hearing are absent in the stock arrangement, but can be identified in versions that HBCUs perform. The popularity of the tune guaranteed its use for various functions, which dictated the way it was written. As part of Norfolk’s dance block, the tubas and percussion set the foundation, with chords heard at 03:00 in the comparison video.<sup>474</sup> These drum and tuba breaks, which migrated to stand arrangements via Hip-Hop, also feature Hampton’s tuba section playing chords at 04:42. Trombone breaks are another device used in Hip-Hop arrangements, as will be discussed in more detail in an upcoming portion of the chapter. They are employed as a textual change during stand tune arrangements and are usually played in divisi, stacking or alternating between 1st, 2nd, and 3rds parts. Hampton (04:45) and Southern (07:05) both execute their ideas effectively. All bands in the video featured percussion parts that were groove-based, like a drum-set, rather than rudimentarily based. This topic will also be addressed later in this chapter.

Jay Bocook is an esteemed arranger, who started with Jensen Publishing, now Hal Leonard, in 1977, because of the high demand by band directors for his unpublished arrangements.<sup>475</sup> He has written a wide array of works, but his background is firmly in the DCI

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<sup>473</sup> Darlene Aderaju, “Take A Daytrip Talk Executive Producing Lil Nas X’s Debut Album ‘Montero’ & Creating ‘Like a Band,’” *Billboard* [online], September 27, 2021, <https://www.billboard.com/music/rb-hip-hop/take-a-daytrip-denzel-baptiste-david-biral-talk-career-executive-producing-montero-9635952/>.

<sup>474</sup> Steven Holiday, “BCU vs NSU vs TnSTATE vs HAMPTON vs SOUTHERN - INDUSTRY BABY 2021 SUPER BATTLE | REACTION REVIEW,” video, 09:42, YouTube, September 2, 2021, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PUhIrPKSeh0>; This video does not represent the wide number of arrangements recorded and posted of this tune. Bandheads often create mash-up comparison videos of songs that are popular. If an arrangement is deemed superior to others in side-by-side comparisons, arrangers can attain notoriety from this as well.

<sup>475</sup> Charlie Menghini, “Jay Bocook,” January 31, 2022, in *Band Talk With Charlie Menghini and Friends*, produced by Charlie Menghini and Matt Ingelson, podcast, MP3 audio, 16:10, <https://bandtalk.libsyn.com/jay-bocook>.

tradition, with no significant evidence of a track record in writing show-style arrangements.<sup>476</sup> Bocook is most likely insulated from the feedback he would need from the Black bandworld with regards to the effectiveness of his charts. Furthermore, if Bocook's method of writing is catered to a mainstream clientele, and is seen as economically viable for the company, then any critiques that I, Marie A. Douglas, or any other show-style alum allege are meaningless. While Bocook's arrangement of "Industry Baby" may be adequate for some, any show-style band caught playing that arrangement would be subject to ridicule.

In his thesis, John Michael Brennan touts the Arrangers Publishing Company, based out of Nashville, Tennessee, as a house producing quality arrangements for high school and collegiate bands. I looked at that arrangement to see if it fared any better than Bocook's. A "Rap Hits" medley, with abridged versions of "Low" (2007), "Yeah" (2004), and "Industry Baby," arranged by Tom Wallace, is displayed prominently on the company homepage.<sup>477</sup> This mash-up may or may not be of the quality that Brennan claims is the standard for the company. The first two tunes of the medley are not something I would use, but the Lil Nas X portion is imaginative, and an improvement over Bocook's.

Even if they are overused, Hip-Hop arrangements are needed for show-style band presentation, and arrangers continue to evolve and develop ideas in writing in what Banfield defines as a Black cultural environment. They write custom material for an appreciative, but demanding, audience that is aware of who they are in the bandworld. Mainstream publishing houses and bands who try to adopt the repertoire of show-style bands, without referencing the

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<sup>476</sup> Hal Leonard, "Writer Biographies-Jay Bocook," <https://www.halleonard.com/biography/159/jay-bocook>.

<sup>477</sup> "Arrangers Publishing Company," *Website Homepage*, <https://arrangerspublishingcompany.com/index.html>; Arrangers' Publishing Company, "Rap Hits," video, 02:09, YouTube, August 22, 2022, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0mJ4C8FVTGQ&t=104s>. Both proponents and opponents of Black music production tend to classify all commercial African-American musical output as rap and Hip-Hop, even though, for example, Usher is firmly an R&B vocalist.

cultural markers that make ensembles noticeable, can still incorporate better arrangements, as Louisiana State University has done, but the environment they are in and the audience they are responsible to is uninterested in doing this cultural work. For musicians within this ecosystem, the originality of the writing is dependent on techniques that are new, and is another source of disagreement. When trying to craft an interesting Hip-Hop arrangement, the skill of motivic composition has become necessary.

### **Arranger as Composer: “Makin’ Somethin’ Outta Nuthin’”**

The statement “makin’ somethin’ outta nuthin’,” is a variation on the common philosophy exercised in Hip-Hop culture, which is to facilitate the creative process by any means, and with the resources you have available, despite any hindrances. Educator Sam Seidel, in his text *Hip-Hop Genius*, offers the original iteration of the phrase when arguing that “creative resourcefulness in the face of limited resources is what Hip-Hop culturalists call “flipping something outta nothing.”<sup>478</sup> Unlike the deficiencies that can be claimed, Seidel cites the ability to be creative when limitations are in play as something to be cultivated. In his words, “discovery, development, and original thought are at the core of [Hip-Hop] genius.”<sup>479</sup> Hip-Hop songs themselves, which many in the bandworld see as inadequate source material for arrangers, can instead be thought of as a springboard to show Hip- Hop genius through their original musical ideas – their composition of new material. Although all aficionados are not enamored with arrangers adding their ideas, but this being accepted or even a source of anticipation by many is reflected by KBThabandhead, who asserts, “I think arrangers have to be very creative these days because of the simplicity of modern pop tunes. [They] gotta add that sauce to it.”<sup>480</sup>

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<sup>478</sup> Sam Seidel, *Hip Hop Genius: Remixing High School Education* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2011), 1.

<sup>479</sup> Ibid.

<sup>480</sup> Comment on “Talk That Talk - Episode 59 So Much to Discuss: Where Do We Begin?!”  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hV8oTZq0cn8>.

In this section, I am detailing what some of “that sauce” is, but I also need to explain who wants to use it, and why it needs to be used in the first place. It is about the philosophy of “flipping” something or repurposing Hip-Hop that is characterized as insufficient source material in comparison to older styles of Black commercial music. To those in disagreement, it is a springboard to show some creativity through composing band arrangements.

In an old discussion thread on bandhead.org, entitled “Nostalgia: A Time Before There Were Drum and Tuba Breaks in Every Song,” commenters made poignant observations as to the direction of modern songwriting as a rationale behind the heavy use of tuba and drum breaks as a structural, composition tool.

PVs ax99: I kinda want to credit it to the fused hip-hop/R&B genre that we know of today. It’s like all of the rap tunes have someone singing the hook or a verse...and all the R&B tunes have a rap verse in them. Likewise, the bands follow suit. I personally enjoy songs without the looping tuba/drum break in them. I get to hear the arranger’s creativity, and the band’s skill. Today’s arrangements leave a lot to be desired.<sup>481</sup>

Xaemill: I think what we have to also consider is that more modern music, i.e. hip hop and rap, it is all about the beat and the hooks so of course there are going to be more breaks. But with R&B and gospel it allows for more musical arrangements because of the structure of the musicality in the verses. But I do agree that it just depends on the mindset of the arranger but I sometimes enjoy the tuba and drum breaks depending on the song.<sup>482</sup>

The last section discussed how a device used for the dance block migrated to general arrangement writing, but not the underlying reasons in Black music output that may be the cause.

In his text, *The Song Machine: Inside the Hit Factory*, John Seabrook explains the difference of the “track and hook” approach to songwriting, as opposed to the “melody and lyrics method.”

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<sup>481</sup> Comment, “Nostalgia: A Time Before There Were Drum and Tuba Breaks in Every Song,” February 3, 2023, <https://bandhead.org/forum/topics/nostalgia-a-time-before-there-were-no-drum-and-tuba-breaks-in-eve>.

<sup>482</sup> Ibid., February 6, 2015.

In [the] melody lyrics approach, melody comes first, a rough sketch of the song. In track/hook the production comes first, and then melody and words are added. Often producers are not looking for a single melody to carry the song, but rather just enough melody to flesh out the production...In a track-and-hook song, the hook comes as soon as possible. Then the song “vamps” – progresses in three- or four-chord patterns with little or no variation. Because it’s repetitive, the vamp requires more hooks: intro; verse, pre-chorus, and outro hooks.<sup>483</sup>

Seabrook enlightens readers about the Jamaican influence on the modern pop song, which usually goes unacknowledged. The construction of “riddims,” or instrumental tracks, preceding the lyrical content, was combined with ideas coming from disco edits and remixes. It is a way of working that comes from a DJ’s perspective. This methodology was first used in Hip-Hop and R&B, then spread to pop, and differed greatly from the melody and lyrics approach traditionally employed in the songwriting centers of New York, Los Angeles, and Nashville. The repetitive nature of these dance floor-oriented songs, under the track and hook approach, dictates that textual changes are needed, which in band arrangements tuba and drum breaks became the basis. When at one-time they were used for the dance routines, they transitioned into a foundational section for arrangements. This made them predetermined for possible overexploitation as a compositional tool for full-fledged Hip-hop arrangements.

This became a topic of discussion between me and FAMU alum and Albany State professor Maruice LeFlore. If the arrangement is structured around the tubas and drums, LeFlore suggests, we “don’t want to eliminate the band...not to say there’s not music in this material.”<sup>484</sup> He continued, observing about what the arranger must compose, “[they have] far more work than they’ve ever had to do...they’re having to add so much to [the song, it’s] just not enough. The other instruments don’t have anything else to do.”<sup>485</sup> Evan Garner reminded me, however, that

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<sup>483</sup> John Seabrook, *The Song Machine: Inside the Hit Factory* (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 2015), 201–202.

<sup>484</sup> Maurie LeFlore, interview with author, March 8, 2021.

<sup>485</sup> Ibid.

when songs are structured using vamps or four-measure loops, the form is more flexible. It's easier to start and end songs at different points in the arrangement, which is better for in-game situations that require bands to stop quickly, before the athletes resume play, or to extend them, if timeouts last longer than planned. Still, for these songs to generate interest, the addition of new material, be it melodic, harmonic, or rhythmic, is the only strategy available to craft a unique, custom arrangement tailored for specific bands. Not all arrangers are equal when it comes to employing this tactic.

Three generations of arrangers illustrate the differences in opinion regarding this topic. Lindsey Sarjeant is the long-standing Chief Arranger for the FAMU Marching 100. He has had an illustrious career as a jazz pianist and music educator at the institution and has been openly critical of bands playing Hip-Hop. He was specific in explaining the difficulty involved in trying to communicate meaning through the music when there is not much to work with, in his estimation. He insisted that he is required to “use his own creativity” to “create things in the song that’s not even on the record.”<sup>486</sup>

So it's our responsibility just to take melody and a drumbeat, and a bassline, [and] to make it sound like the piece, but yet use your own embellishment tools in terms of harmony and voice leading. That's the challenge...I hate writing some of these dance routines now. Y'all know why, because there's nothing there...Sometimes you have to use your own creativity to create some harmony where there is none. Just as long as you have the melody and bassline and maintain that integrity of the piece. So that when people hear the first three notes of that piece, they know exactly what it is. But the major difference is just the music itself. When you start examining the way music was made by The O'Jays, Stylistics, and Earth Wind and Fire – when you look at that music as opposed to the music of today, it's just completely different.<sup>487</sup>

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<sup>486</sup> Eddie Evans Pro, “The Legends Edition: Paul Adams x Lindsey Sarjeant Part 2,” video, 01:59:05, YouTube, June 16, 2020, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3Yvdn0MKwQ4>.

<sup>487</sup> Advocates For Music and Music Education Association, “AMMEA’s In The Hot Seat With FAMU’s Mr. Lindsey Sarjeant,” video, 16:44, YouTube, May 19, 2020, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WJZ6YEGQTA>.

Sarjeant stands on principle with a strong rationale intact. He, as do other arrangers of note in the Black bandworld, has perfect pitch. His processing of tonal centers and relationship to sound is different from many of us – he compares various key signatures to pieces of fruit. This ability to hear is partnered with a mastery of harmony, voice leading concepts, and knowledge of the acoustics and optimal ranges of band instruments, with the goal of “[maintaining] the integrity of the arrangement.”<sup>488</sup> Sarjeant stresses that his primary goal is to make a song better through embellishment, not the composition of new material. He feels that in the quest to be creative, young arrangers are adding “chords that are not related” and are “destroying the intent” of the piece.<sup>489</sup> A compliment about his writing, given directly from Michael Jackson, was reassurance that his approach is accurate. While working with the McDonald’s All-American High School Marching Band in California, Sarjeant learned that Jackson had listened to FAMU and was impressed by him after learning he was the Chief Arranger for the Marching 100. The artist expressed that Sarjeant’s method of arranging his pieces supported his vision of the original, which he appreciated.

Trenton Hunter is introspective and likes to consider different angles of an issue. He doesn’t want to put limitations on his creativity, but says he is also selective about what he wants to write. The amount of new material needed to be added to an arrangement is a considerable criterion.

When I write music for marching band, I’m super selective... There’s certain things I like to hear. If there’s not like a big presence [of] melody, I typically stay away from it. I wrote tunes where I might’ve had to add a little bit more to it. But for the most part, I like to write within the music, because that’s the essence of arranging. Taking something that’s there and adding your own interpretation to it.<sup>490</sup>

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<sup>488</sup> Ibid., 15:14.

<sup>489</sup> Ibid, 16:30.

<sup>490</sup> Trenton Hunter, interview with the author, September 12, 2021.



[them],” but also expressed concerns. He continued by cautioning that, “The only problem I have with how people are doing trombone breaks now, I just don’t want them to be so standard...I don’t want it to like a ‘Rap Etude.’”<sup>492</sup> He explained an example of a “trombone break etude,” which can be heard in many arrangements, as one that starts with a tuba bass line. Then, “I can put some tuba chords in there, or I do a trumpet part [where] I just need to scream [play in extreme upper register] everything. Or if I’m doin’ a trombone part, I do the same triplet rhythm” (Figure 4.5).<sup>493</sup>



Figure 4.5: Common Trombone Break Rhythmic Figure.

Because of the slower BPM trap music, the Atlanta subgenre of Hip-Hop that has influenced all of pop music, this type of figure, or a variation of it, can be heard in many arrangements. The so-called “Migos Flow,” when an emcee’s rhythmic flow is subdivided into eighth and sixteenth note triplets over a slow BPM track, was mistakenly credited to the group by the artist Drake. However, the commercialization of Hip-Hop, plus the overwhelming popularity of the group has spawned many imitators across genres. Their rhythmic style has infiltrated all commercial music-making, and show-style band arrangements. The overuse of this type of rhythmic idea has prompted criticisms of arrangers being unoriginal. Music educator Kuan Mitchell stated, “How are we transitioning forward?...Triplet, Triplet, Triplet...I get ya, but I don’t wanna hear that on every song. We gotta start diving deep into the creativity of what

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<sup>492</sup> Trenton Hunter, interview with the author, March 16, 2023.

<sup>493</sup> Ibid.

we can bring to the table.”<sup>494</sup> Hunter sees the rhythmic figure as a crutch, or a stand-in, when the musical imagination is failing. He urges less experienced writers to “do what makes sense for the song, and try not to make it so standard, or just try to put things you heard in other songs, even if it don’t make sense.”<sup>495</sup>

Hunter offered to do a partial analysis of his arrangement of “Say You Will” (2008), also by Kanye West, as an example of advanced trombone break writing. I remembered being impressed by this section during the Fall 2022 season, but I didn’t know it was a trombone break. It sounded so unique in comparison to others. When I learned during the score analysis that the addition of the mellophones with the alto saxes doubling was behind the sound, it allowed me to understand Hunter’s methodology and seasoned skill-set.

One of his methods for diversifying trombone breaks actually came earlier in our conversation when Hunter described the adaptability of the mellophones (F horns). He thinks they are underutilized in modern writing in relation to the versatility of the instrument, due to its wide range, and likes to use them with trombones in isolated sections of the arrangement (Figure 4.6).

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<sup>494</sup> Passion Is..., “Talk That Talk - Episode 59 So Much to Discuss: Where Do We Begin?!” 01:29:18.

<sup>495</sup> Hunter, March 16, 2023.

Figure 4.6: T. Hunter Trombone Break Example – Full.

M.1 and m.2 are the last two measures of the drum and tuba break, when repeated, but m.3 is the unmarked second ending that acts as a lead-in to the trombone break. This is typical, because trombone breaks are usually placed after tuba and percussion breaks.

Figure 4.7: M.4 (Beginning of Trombone Break).

In m.4 of this example (see Figure 4.7) after the unison line in the mellophones and 1st trombones, we see trombones voiced in four voices on an A-flat 9 chord. Interestingly, the

mellophones are interwoven with the trombones in their lush middle register, which is one of Hunter's devices. He shared that he "[puts] them in so it feels like five-part harmony."<sup>496</sup> The 1st trombone actually has a higher sounding tone than the 2nd mellophone, which holds a concert B-flat for the entire bar. Hunter smiled when explaining the aural misdirection he likes to display in his writing. "You're hearing somethin', but you don't know where its comin' from," he says.<sup>497</sup>



Figure 4.8: Third and Fourth Bar of the Trombone Break.

This compositional sleight-of-hand also works for D half-diminished 7, with an added 9th, in m.6 (see Figure 4.8), where the mellophones seemingly take over with the consonant-

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<sup>496</sup> Ibid.

<sup>497</sup> Ibid.

dissonant-consonant-dissonant movement in the upper voicings. “A lot of people probably saw the first trombone slide movement playing that,” Hunter surmises, “But I got the first F-horns on that too.”<sup>498</sup> This leads to a G dominant 7 resolution with sharp-9, flat-9, and flat-13 alterations. The interwoven close and cross voicings cause tension in the first two beats before a more constant sound is achieved with 2nd trombone moving off of the E-flat, which could be considered the flat-13th, to D-natural, the fifth. Also, on beats three and four, we see that the mellophones take the moving line lead-in, heard in m.3 on their own. Hunter states that his compositional goal for the section was attained by paying attention to details. “It’s a lot of things that are meshed together and gives it a more cohesive sound...Let’s have everybody play a little bit of everything...This song probably gives the biggest example of that, where I just want it to sound and not really just instruments playing.”<sup>499</sup>

The last observation I offer is meant to bring attention to the grace notes, appoggiatura, the 32nd note figures, and the accents. These devices are not isolated from trombone breaks, and they harken back to the interventionist music practices, some that the Harlem Hellfighters might have used under the baton of James Reese Europe, which were mentioned in Chapter 2. These small but vital details distinguish arrangements that Hunter writes from those that Hal Leonard might publish. They are indications of ways to vocalize through the horn. It is a technique made easier on the trombone because of the adjustments that instrumentalists can make with the slide. More than just phrase markings, players need to “sing” through their instruments in a manner that reflects the sounds coming out of the Black church. It is a commonality between the arranger

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<sup>498</sup> Ibid.

<sup>499</sup> Ibid.

and the player, not all of whom are African American, that is understood, but still written as a reminder of the kinds of sounds sought after, and the approach to playing that needs to be taken.

Evan Garner is still a student at Albany State University and does not have the arranging experience of Trenton Hunter, but his sense of awareness in assessing his ability speaks to his overall musical maturity. As a member of Georgia Mass Band, he continues to learn from studying charts of Matthew Buggs, Antonio D. Alexander, and Marcus Cummings. His response was one of excitement when I asked him about the trend of arrangers as motivic composers – this is something that he, too, has noticed. As a trombonist, he was especially apt to mention trombone breaks.

Evan Garner: I've noticed it in mass band specifically, and then when I heard it in mass band, I heard the other bands do their thing. I feel like that just comes from the composer themselves. Having little melodic lines. For example, mellophone lines, counterparts, trombone breaks – My God!

Kevin Green: Please talk about that.

Garner: Trombone breaks from my point of view is one hundred percent, how you feeling about the piece. That's your point in time to step away from the song, but to put something in the song that has your name on it one hundred percent. You can say, "I didn't get this from anywhere else," and express how you feel and how you are as a composer. Express the musicality in your trombone section as far as being able to stack notes, chords, [and] rhythms. It's all up to the composer at that point in time.<sup>500</sup>

Garner cites Jackson State University's arrangement of "Make No Sense" (2019) by NBA YoungBoy as an example. He observes, "The trombone break in that has nothing to do with the actual song. It's stacks, it's chorded–rhythmic. I like it. It's a hundred percent telling us how you feel about the song, [and] how you write as well. What you can do."<sup>501</sup>

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<sup>500</sup> Evan Garner, interview with author, October 7, 2022.

<sup>501</sup> Ibid.

Two points made by Garner stand in contrast to Sarjeant's and Hunter's based on opinions. He indicates that trombone breaks allow arrangers to "step away from the song," or that they "[have] nothing to do with the actual song," instead of embellishing material that already exists; this counters the approach that Sarjeant likes to use.<sup>502</sup> In the case of the example that Evan suggested (01:13), the incorrect use of added harmony that young arrangers use when composing, a problem identified by Sarjeant, does not apply.<sup>503</sup> The twice-repeated phrase uses the rhythmic, broken-stacked, chord approach, as Evan stated he likes, but which Trenton Hunter feels might be overused. I didn't realize it during our interview, but I was actually standing in front of the band when they played this tune during a 5th Quarter battle against Tennessee State. Formulaic or not, the trombone break was a powerful lead-in to the next section (01:25). Structurally, the next section also followed typical patterns. It was a two-measure textual change where the drums and sousaphones dropped out, used to accent the upper brass sections playing powerfully. Before moving on to another topic with Garner, I asked him what ideas can be used to prevent arrangements from becoming formulaic. He did not have an answer, but he appreciated the question. It was a problem he hopes to solve, perhaps by analyzing scores that include atypical content, like Trenton Hunter's, and it is something he will keep in mind moving forward.

Arrangers and bandheads in the African-American bandworld have probably not heard of Sam Seidel, but are most likely familiar with the notion of doing the best that you can with the resources available. The viability of Hip-Hop as source material will continue to be a debate, and arrangers will continue to write these tunes unless Hip-Hop itself falls out of favor with Black

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<sup>502</sup> Ibid.

<sup>503</sup> TRIN, "Jackson State University 2022 | Make No Sense | SHC," video, 03:12, YouTube, September 12, 2022, [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3H1vJL8LI\\_E](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3H1vJL8LI_E).

listeners. Techniques arrangers employ to personalize their version of these tunes have to do with chord substitutions, rhythmic devices, and textural changes, because of the general lack of melodic content in the track and hook construction of most modern commercial music. Opinions based on the familiarity or newness of compositional devices will not prevent arrangers from copying what they hear, or experimenting with methods that are unproven to compose new material. Many arrangers in the bandworld started training in some fashion during high school, but the younger generation of arrangers now use the resources available to them. They commandeered technology for writing charts on their own, before being taught the basic rules of music theory. The older generation didn't have access to these tools that would allow them to hear their arrangements being played by MIDI computer sounds. They see this as a possible hindrance or deterrent for learning theoretical concepts that are necessary for writing and composing music. In the next section, I cover the culture of the arranger, in pedagogy and practice.

### **Arrangers in Culture, Pedagogy, and Practice: Woodwinds and Brass**

This section is somewhat bittersweet. Maybe because I have to face my own possible shortcomings and tactical mistakes: a continuing struggle with music theoretical concepts; not taking the marching band arranging class with Mr. Adams; not writing any tunes while a member of the Sonic Boom, when the expectation was stated publicly by the band directors; or the fact that I'm slow with alto sax (E-flat) and mellophone (F) transpositions. I simply was not ready for the challenge in terms of skills, but also with regards to confidence.

Perhaps this is because I knew that there is gravity attached to the three words that entitle this section. Although arranging in the African-American bandworld is about learning instrument ranges, understanding how the overtone series is applied to writing, and proper voice leading

techniques, it also goes beyond that. It is a culture within a culture. Regardless of the classes offered on the collegiate level, there isn't just one book or methodology that can be used. To date, identical to when major retailers fail to stock haircare products made for African Americans, there isn't just one text for sale that applies to the writing requirements needed for show-style groups. Autodidactic and peer-based learning is standard, as is to learn by doing, to fail, and to get embarrassed in front of your peers because your chart is full of mistakes or doesn't resonate with the band.

Teenage arrangers have access to free music notation software which gives them the ability to create their own compositions, even if they don't know all of the rules. When they're finished writing something, they will challenge each other to arranger battles by letting people view their scores while the MIDI playback allows listeners to hear it, and they will wait to get feedback from more experienced arrangers who were there to witness it. Mostly, there is an understanding that various facets of music, standardized or not, can be used for arrangers to create a style of writing that is unique to them, outside of what many students at PWIs learn from the "proper" arranging text they may use. In the Black bandworld, there isn't a proverbial book, but something more akin to a plethora of resources, methodologies, or pathways to garner the knowledge necessary for show-style arranging.

One source of knowledge, like most aspects in Black American musicianship, is the institution of the Black church. For many in the bandworld, even if it was singing or playing rhythm section instruments, it was their initial place and training ground for musical engagement. Ethnomusicologists Portia K. Maultsby and Mellonee V. Burnim have contributed a formidable amount of knowledge informing laypersons of the connection between sacred and secular music-making in the Black community, but the focus has primarily been on players, not

writers. During a conference paper presentation, I shared an epiphany I had as an undergraduate student in Jackson, after being hired to play drums alongside retired Director of Bands, Dowl Taylor.<sup>504</sup> As the organ player for his church, I was in a position to hear his voicings on the B3, and hear how his organ playing translated to his marching band arranging. In a separate interview, pianist, percussionist, composer, and TnSU Aristocrat of Bands alum James Hurt relayed the importance of the church as a training ground for his overall musicianship, but also as an arranger while attending the institution. Much of what he said dealt with him needing to learn how musical concepts on the piano could connect to parishioners viscerally, because it wasn't something he could do, or even a concept of note outside of the church. "The church didn't involve the kinds of training that you associate with academia or conservatory... Everyone I knew who played gospel piano knew every key, knew all the piano licks that make everybody scream at church... I didn't know none of that."<sup>505</sup> The importance of the ear that he needed for playing "ten-thousand Sunday stages" and at "church conventions, socials, and funerals" was the same skill-set he needed to constantly transcribe and write "every new song that came out" as an arranger.<sup>506</sup>

The style of knowledge acquisition that occurs in church mirrors an ethos of autodidacticism and peer-based learning that is a pervasive part of people arranging in the Black bandworld. Hurt comes from a family of scientists – chemists, to be exact. He applied that methodology to learning piano and arranging, in addition to his church training, or formal percussion training at secondary school. He was enamored with the writing of Jerry Goldsmith

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<sup>504</sup> Kevin P. Green, "It's About Musicianship, Pedagogy, and Lineage: Reflections on Historically Black College and University Music Department Communities" (conference paper, American Musicological Society/Society for Ethnomusicology/Society for Music Theory Joint Conference, New Orleans, LA, November 11, 2022).

<sup>505</sup> James Hurt, interview with author, June 2018.

<sup>506</sup> James Hurt, interview with author, September 18, 2018.

and Lalo Schiffrin, but his main influence was Quincy Jones. He transcribed all of Quincy's productions while in high school, with the albums *Sound..and Stuff Like That* (1978) and *The Dude* (1981) being highly impactful. His experiments led him to method books. One in particular that he recommended to me is *Voicings for Jazz Keyboard*, by Frank Mantooth.<sup>507</sup> This book helped him internalize voicings based on fourths as opposed to thirds, "in a style we associate with Take 6."<sup>508</sup> He associated concepts learned in the book with a "floating sound," and said, "That's how [you] get these chords spread out like that. I started doing some stuff with the marching band...I had other ways of stacking stuff to make the band sound extremely loud with fewer people than FAMU or Southern..."<sup>509</sup>

Claire Milburn's autodidactic methodology was more traditional. It was through self-discovery, and understanding that she wanted to be a music teacher, while still in high school, that prompted her to practice all of the different instruments available to her in the bandroom. She took jazz band and choir, in addition to marching band, and added transcription as a skill early on. She also brought up the concept of learning from failure, which will be a recurring theme.

Claire Milburn: I had always wanted to be a teacher. I loved helping people. Going to band camp was transformative. [When] learning how to march and play [and] learning how to dance, I felt success. After a school research project I discovered this desire. By the end of high school, through self teaching and asking friends, I had played all the instruments.

Kevin Green: How did you approach arranging in high school?

Milburn: The first ones were really bad. I started by transcribing Norfolk State arrangements. I thought they sounded good and wanted to write them down. In 2009. The first one I got passed out was Norfolk State's "Dirty Diana" [1987].<sup>510</sup>

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<sup>507</sup> Frank Mantooth, *Voicings for Jazz Keyboard* (Milwaukee, WI: Hal Leonard, 1997).

<sup>508</sup> Hurt, June 2018.

<sup>509</sup> Ibid.

<sup>510</sup> Milburn, interview with author.

Having the opportunity to fail, or to try something unpolished should be compared to James Hurt’s experimentalism, because writers in this community, by and large, learn through doing.

Trenton Hunter said that Blake Gaines, a well-known arranger in the bandworld, would not look or listen to his arrangements when Gaines was his high school director, which encouraged him to work harder. Hunter too, had a background as a church musician that he could draw upon, as well as being a multi-instrumentalist. He developed his ear to the point that in high school and college, he often wrote without a keyboard, and had usually not heard his arrangements before they were played by the band. He did not indicate that he had perfect pitch, as arrangers of note – Brian Simmons of TxSU, Lindsey Sarjeant of FAMU, and Kevon Johnson of JSU do – but was proud of being able to write away from a piano. Hunter stressed that his time to experiment was during his student teaching phase, at Jill Hill High School, which eventually led to a position as Jim Hill’s Assistant Band Director after a stint teaching middle school. His time under Head Band Director Christopher Little was “transformative.”

He was like, “Do whatever you want.” Whatever I wanted to play, whatever I wanted to pass out to the band, he just let me do it. So I got a lot of trial and error with that band...Just experiment and go. Jim Hill was the first band I actually got reps in with. Whatever I wrote, we were going to play it. And I had as much time as I wanted to work the band...If we had a battle of the bands, I had the material. It was a great experience for me. I always appreciate him for that.<sup>511</sup>

Marie A. Douglas and Jaylon Taylor are at dissimilar stages on their journey as writers, but they share that access to music technology and peer-feedback has assisted them, along with modes of self-learning. Marie started with a Casio keyboard, printing manuscript paper from an online source, and learning ranges and transpositions from borrowing various *I Recommend*

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<sup>511</sup> Hunter, September 12, 2021.

instrumental method books from friends.<sup>512</sup> Soon after acquiring *Finale* 2002 from a friend, she was able to write Fat Joe's "Lean Back" (2004). Marie expressed that she started writing to fill a void because her band director was removed from the classroom for reasons she is not sure of. Her feedback came from peers, even though she says it was sometimes delivered bluntly.

Jaylon Taylor started writing as an eleventh grader at Central High School. He came across Muscores, which is a browser-based, downloadable music notation software that is popular amongst arrangers in the Black bandworld. Most start with the free version, which also has a social media component, which serves as another source of feedback. Even when others like Evan Garner and Kendrick Williams are exposed to more "professional" programs like *Finale* and *Sibelius*, they always revert back to Muscores.

J. Taylor said his first attempt to write included transcribing a Southern University arrangement of the Childish Gambino song "Money Baby" (2014). Jaylon struggled in his first attempt, but went instrument by instrument, starting with the tubas, and then worked his way up. At this point, he wasn't thinking in terms of chord progressions, a mistake he now recognizes. I asked him who influenced his style and what his process was for getting feedback.

Brian Simmons. He was trying to recruit me to come to Southern...I've always been a fan of his arrangements, and I've studied his arrangements by listening to them. Picking out how he voices his songs and who he gives certain parts to. So I feel he's had the biggest impact on me, but..being one on one with somebody when they're actually seeing my stuff, Dr. [Ollie] Liddell used to do that for me in high school. I show him something, he'd tell me what he thought. When I was in college, I used to let Mr. [Kevon] Johnson look at my stuff too in his office. Most of my inspiration came from friends. I always let my friends listen. They gave me their raw opinions.<sup>513</sup>

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<sup>512</sup> Here is an example of an *I Recommend* method book: <https://www.sweetwater.com/store/detail/00-EL02577--alfred-music-i-recommend-band-method-book-b-flat-clarinet>.

<sup>513</sup> Taylor, interview with author.

Lindsey Sarjeant is a proponent of more traditional training when it comes to learning how to write for marching band. As a precursor to him writing for the Florida A&M Marching 100, he started by listening to albums, at the request of Dr. Foster. His perfect pitch abilities would allow him to form concepts from consuming marching band albums from University of Michigan, Michigan State, Purdue, and the University of Southern California. The goal for Sarjeant, as Foster told him, was to figure out what kind of sound he wanted.

What really set my foundation was when I was younger, in college, and I had to listen to all these [W]hite college bands. I listened to that cornball music, and this is what I don't want my arrangements to sound like. Some of them were pretty good. But one band in particular that I enjoyed most was University of Michigan...[Jerry Bilik] was very influential because he's the one who came up with the same system that I use at Florida A&M University. He came down to Florida A&M when I was a student. I sat in on some of his workshops that he had with the band staff. And I learned a hell of a lot as a student just watching him and listening to his music [while looking at] his score diagrams.<sup>514</sup>

Developing and being grounded in a style allowed Sarjeant to challenge the arranger for Florida State's marching band, even though he had to study under him to earn his graduate degree. Charles Carter was a prestigious arranger but his methods did not lend themselves to the sound Sarjeant was seeking. "He and I bumped heads a lot, because his whole concept of arranging was more symphonic, and mine was based upon sound...I learned a lot from Charles Carter. I learned what not to do. How I did not want my arrangements to sound."<sup>515</sup>

The importance of music theory is something that was communicated by all the arrangers I spoke with in one form or another. Some, like Trenton Hunter and Kendrick Williams, had access to music theory class while in high school. Lindsey Sarjeant is steadfast in his belief that

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<sup>514</sup> Advocates For Music and Music Education Association, "AMMEA's In The Hot Seat With FAMU's Mr. Lindsey Sarjeant," 33:30.

<sup>515</sup> Ibid, 06:14.

young arrangers' use of software is hindering their development. He urges them to begin with the study of harmony, voice leading, the rules of counterpoint, and much more:

I don't know of any arranger who's worth their salt that doesn't know anything about music theory...All those things are related to the arranging process. What I see in a lot of the younger arrangers, [is] they try to bypass the fundamentals...It shows in their arrangements because their arrangements lack a certain cohesiveness, just in terms of harmony itself. The best tool an arranger can have is harmony.<sup>516</sup>

What Sarjeant is overlooking is a series of processes that some younger arrangers are combining. Unlike others in their peer group, these arrangers draw from training in traditional music theory instead of trying to bypass it, but also use ideas garnered from beat making in digital audio workstations (DAWs). New ways of working are beginning to manifest themselves as a result.

Evan Garner attended a performing arts secondary school, which did not have a marching band, but was introduced to the DAW Fruity Loops (FL Studio) by his cousin in Memphis. He then took a rigorous high school music production class where students had to learn how to mix, how to program in MIDI, and had to show proficiency in other skills beyond beat making. When I asked him how this background contributed to his arranging, his answer drifted into the skills he learned in music theory, and to practical experience. In other words he attributed all of his skills, plus having room to fail, as all having helped him improve.

I would use the 808 patterns as a sousaphone bassline. It hasn't worked the best because I like a lot of 808 slides. Having a prior knowledge on making beats and trying to come over to student arranging, it was kinda tough as far as countermelodies... What I can say is what I did understand is voicings and where things are supposed to be. Chords were placed in certain spots. Countermelody here, harmony here, melody there, bassline there. Theory. It was a huge part of it. You can't do anything music related without theory, prior knowledge or basic knowledge of theory.<sup>517</sup>

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<sup>516</sup> Ibid. 09:47.

<sup>517</sup> Garner, interview with author.

Kendrick Williams, who will be going into his first year of college in Fall of 2023, has had the benefit of all modes of learning we have discussed thus far. He has gravitated towards a wide variety of music beyond the gospel and Hip-Hop music of his native Memphis, such as the music of composers Hans Zimmer and Ludwig Göransson, but still studies the Hip-Hop producers that hail from the city. He started arranging in the eighth grade, but already had prior knowledge of music production software for beat making and composition purposes.

Transpositions were unfamiliar to him before high school, but through modes of self-learning, he made sure to familiarize himself with them and instrument ranges. Kendrick has taken Advanced Placement Music Theory classes offered at Central High School and can apply the principles of counterpoint, certain harmonic sequences, and proper use of the overtone series to his writing. He, unlike others, was also the recipient of instruction in arranging from his Assistant Band Director, Jaylon Taylor, which has helped streamline all of his skills.

I asked Jaylon what some of the ideas were he shared with Kendrick. “I tried to share with him every mistake that I made when I was his age.”<sup>518</sup> J. Taylor explained that the way he chose to display his durational values was confusing for band members trying to sight-read the music. His work would “flop” or wouldn’t “gel” as a result, because the charts were unplayable. This, amongst other lessons learned from failure, is what he hopes to pass on to Williams.

Kendrick is mastering a truly diverse set of skills. I wanted to know his method of integrating composing, beat making, and arranging for band into one cohesive practice.

Kendrick Williams: We start with the tubas. Foundation. [Of] course when you listen to rap songs...there’s always something going crazy in the bassline. So that went into [writing]. Also beat making and composing ties in hand to hand cuz composing. I’m thinking in a 4/4 measure, “I want each beat, something different

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<sup>518</sup> Taylor, interview with author.

goin' on." So that transpired into my beat making. Which then went into my arranging. I try to have something new...going on every beat in my arranging.

Kevin Green: So how much of your beat making comes from the show-style marching band?

Williams: A lot. I always think about if I was to blow up as a producer or something... I always make my beats to the point that a band could play the beat versus the lyric.<sup>519</sup>

Writing tunes for the band, and having them passed out to play are two different steps, both of which Kendrick has accomplished. Part of my interest in interviewing him came from hearing his arrangements of "Heyy" (2022) by Lil Baby, and "See Wat I'm Sayin" (2022) by Moneybagg Yo, while attending a gym battle between Central and Craigmont, in December of 2022. Kendrick likes to listen closely to all of the musical material. He makes a distinction between a melodic line derived from a sing-song rapping style heard in "Heyy" (2022), and the backing track.

Coming from an arranging standpoint, when you try to arrange Hip-Hop songs...it used to be you'd only write the melody that the rapper or particular artist is singing. And nowadays...producers have become more skilled in their piano skills and ways in which they compose beats...You can take the beat and actually make that into your arrangement. [*He sings a melodic line.*] You take that and put it into your band arrangement. It makes it more interesting.<sup>520</sup>

He is also very much aware of techniques that go into constructing beats, as he named Tay Keith, the producer on "See Wat I'm Sayin" as someone he listens to. This is further proof of the kinds of processes at work for young arrangers who adopt a variety of learning schemes.

It is not by mistake that Jaylon Taylor communicated that the desire to arrange for bands has increased. Even in this study, I thought about taking arranging lessons, possibly trying to rectify a mistake I had made as an undergrad. However, if arranging is a culture within a culture

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<sup>519</sup> Williams, interview with author.

<sup>520</sup> Ibid.

that some band members find themselves in, there is a space that arrangers must manage that is separate from the others. The world of percussion and percussionist has always been nebulous to many arrangers. In the next section, we investigate the procedures, the efforts made, and the parties responsible for adding percussion parts to the arrangements.

### **Collaborative Writing with the Percussion Section**

All the above analysis of knowledge acquisition and application, along with the scores themselves, have addressed what arranger Paul I. Adams has called the brass and woodwind choirs for the band. The realities and philosophies for the percussion section, when it comes to constructing parts, are not standardized, and I invoke Adams' name because he thinks that the drumline should receive written parts, like all other members of the band, instead of creating their own parts and learning them by ear. In reality, there are numerous ways of working that I recall from being a band member, and more I have uncovered during my research period. In this section, I go through all the various methods that I have discovered, without making any arguments as to which one should be used. If anything, the methods I share can all be used situationally, especially because most of them foster a spirit of collaboration that builds comradery, confidence, and cohesion with students.

During my first year in the Sonic Boom's War and Thunder Drum Section, parts were created in one of three ways: we worked collaboratively as a section to craft parts, one member of the section who was also a DJ would "program" the parts as he would a drum machine, or parts would be dictated to us by Lumark Gulley in the bandroom, if he was the arranger of the piece. In 1992, there was not any written music given to us for custom-written arrangements. We only received sheet music for marches, warm-up chorales, and patriotic songs.

Lumark is another individual I covered in my conference presentation about people who were influential to me from JSU's music department. My now deceased friend and mentor had played trombone in the marching band, but by 1992 he acted as somewhat of an official student arranger, because many of the charts that the band still plays were written by him.

Like many in the bandworld, Lumark doubled on rhythm section instruments, and his experience on drum set would influence what he wanted the marching drum section to play. He practiced and played gigs as a drummer, as it was his intention to work as a professional jazz musician. With his ability to sight-read anything, his apparent perfect time, and his incredibly tasteful playing, his chair as the drummer in Jazz Ensemble 1 was not threatened by me, or anybody else. Lumark, however, was not a rudimental drummer. Drum set players do use rudiments, which he did, but they are interpreted differently on a marching snare drum than they are behind the kit. In short, Lumark wanted "groove-based" parts for his arrangements and didn't notate rudimental parts for the drum section. Like any great rhythm section, he wanted us to lock in with the bass, or in this case the tubas, and he would dictate the basic drum groove he desired while the tubas would repeat their phrase. If someone in the section anticipated what he wanted and played something he liked, minor collaborations would occur with his nod of approval.

The importance of chops, technique, or heavy use of rudiments, in comparison to feel, pocket, and groove, is an age-old argument in the drumming community, but it is usually assumed that a marching drumline is married to rudimental playing. The type of music that show-style bands play is often backbeat driven, and crafting parts based on rudiments is not the best choice. As for the use of rudiments in a groove-based style, Vincent Harriston, a GAMB quint player, commented that groove and pocket set the foundation for parts, and that rudiments

help fill up the space.<sup>521</sup> Parts are not constructed with rudiments in mind, as they are in corps-style settings.

Two former bandmates of mine, Mike Robinson and Xavyon Jamison, and I reminisced about a snare drummer in our section who usually crafted parts. I omitted his name on purpose, because I was unable to locate him, but there was still some consistency in our recollections about procedures between the three of us. War and Thunder would meet isolated away from the rest of the band, in the drum room or outdoors, where we would get the most of our work in. Like many Hip-Hop producers, the snare drummer would start with the bass drumbeat, the lowest frequency instrument, and then create something for the snare drums. Once that was done, the tenor drums, quads, and cymbals would be added, while the beat was being looped by the snares and bass drums. At any time, if this bandmate heard something he didn't like, he would take a part out, and redo it. When, as a section, we debuted our parts with the rest of the band, it would be approved.

This collaborative manner of working, between the percussion section and the arranger, is very much normalized in the Black bandworld. Linsey Sarjeant prefers the percussionist to create parts for his arrangements. "Those guys are much more creative than I am. I know how to write percussion. I can do it well, but I don't like to, because in every group I have percussion players. Even [in] some of the high school bands, percussion players are great players."<sup>522</sup>

Former FAMU drumline member Terrance Bacon was one of those high school players. At Miami Norland Senior High School, Bacon would collaborate with his band director to create show material for the drumline. Cooperation in show-style bands extends to all sections, because

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<sup>521</sup> Vincent Harriston, discussion with author, June 16, 2022.

<sup>522</sup> Advocates For Music and Music Education Association, "AMMEA's In The Hot Seat With FAMU's Mr. Lindsey Sarjeant," 01:13:32.

band directors depend on students for the most current songs or cultural references that will be appealing to listeners. The students help bring entertainment value to the show, which needs to be reflected in the arrangements. The bulk of the responsibility falls to the drumline, due to the rhythmic driven nature of modern music.

Bacon, as a member of the show planning committee and dance committee, had a complete concept of the show, which contributed to his ideas for part construction. At this stage, the committees are choosing some of the songs they want to use.

I had to continuously have my ear to what people may like, or what people may think is the song of the year... So we would have to, "I heard this on the radio and everybody goes crazy. We gotta put this in the dance routine, or we gotta put this in the show. We gotta play this when we do this performance." So I always have my ear to the radio, or whatever people may listen to.<sup>523</sup>

Once the repertoire for all portions of the show was chosen, the band director would arrange the music without the drum parts. The students had to collaborate again to create their parts. I asked Bacon about his source for ideas.

If there's a song I know we're going to play, I would get inspired by listening to the actual song. Or I would listen to the instrumental, if it had an instrumental, and put my own flavor to it. I didn't really try to mimic the exact beat... [The drumline] made up the parts ourselves... Me being section leader, I would bring it to my right and left hand man when it came to the section. I would say, "Hey, this is the beat." Now, how can we twist it and turn it to make it sound like, "Ooo! I like how they twisted this," or [put] this little interlude here, or this drum fill here.<sup>524</sup>

Bacon's section in high school wrote using a concept of an acoustic drummer's interpretation of drum machine-made material, when played in the live concert setting. In other words, many drummers in the 1990s, who played Hip-Hop-influenced R&B, were some of the first asked to convert the drum machine constructed parts heard on recordings for live

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<sup>523</sup> Terrance Bacon, interview with author, August 21, 2021.

<sup>524</sup> Ibid.

performances. Bacon and his bandmates transferred these sounds to a marching section format that included tonal bass drums, leg tenors, quads, snare drums, and cymbals.

In Jackson, at a Magnolia All-Stars rehearsal, Tony Morgan reiterated what Bacon had shared about the collaborative process. Taking inspiration from the original song is a typical way of working, but the original beat doesn't have to limit the musical ideas used: they can and do always come from unexpected places. Morgan stressed that their drumline starts with the pocket and groove of the original drum pattern, but he surprisingly mentioned that they may also add rhythmic material from the lyrical flow of the rapper. He even stated that sound from the other sections in the band, like "the color of the woodwinds" can dictate adjustments to what they create.<sup>525</sup>

Kendrick Williams explained subtle differences in the collaborative process for the percussion section at Central. Like the others, he is in tune with Black music aesthetics of having the drums lock and gel with the tubas, or the low-end material, first, which again defies straight rudimental drumming logic, but their approach is also influenced by Kendrick's role as drumline section leader and sometimes as the arranger of his own song.

Kendrick Williams: Once I make an arrangement, I'll text them and be like "Hey, for this particular part of my song, I want, *yada, yada, yada*." I have a part committee that goes out, and makes the parts for us.

Kevin Green: Explain that, because I've never heard that term "part committee."

Williams: So...instead of takin' the whole section, and we all workin' on the part...there's certain members of the section I delegate to go make parts for the songs. So that way the rest of the section can keep workin' on material while the trustworthy people that I know that know the material, they can go work on parts for the songs.<sup>526</sup>

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<sup>525</sup> Tony Morgan, discussion with author, June 14, 2022.

<sup>526</sup> Williams, interview with author.

Kendrick has already stated that communication between him, the assistant band director, and the Director of Bands is strong. If this relationship is not well established, the collaborative process can become compromised. Paul Woods, from Kentucky State University, raised this point during an HBCU percussion roundtable session.

The recognition is not given and taken for granted [of] what we do...but then we get on the field and mess up. As a section leader, we may be thinking in our heads like, “you only gave us ten minutes to get the beat together.” So as a drum instructor..or percussion section leader we wanna know one thing... Ok. We playin’ this song. Are we playing it verbatim, radio style? What’s the arrangement? What’s the intro? What do you want? A lot of times we don’t get that information. So when we come back with a beat...a lot of times, band directors... they put us on front street. “Percussionist, you didn’t do this! Go back!” It’s kinda makin’ us feel bad. Like you ain’t give all the tools that we needed to make everything come together, as the drum section blending with the band.<sup>527</sup>

Woods admitted that the percussion section itself may be to blame if the process breaks down because of competing aesthetics. HBCU drumlines prepare many drum cadences for battle situations, but time does not always allow for them to be performed during the football game. Woods acknowledged that the part-writing process can become compromised, if instead of crafting a percussion part that grooves and fits the song, they create something that is “overly choppy,” akin to a drummer being too busy. The band director may be unhappy with what they hear due to the section trying to compensate for not being able to play their cadences. Music educator and band media host Krystal Williams commented that being uncreative or overambitious can cause percussion parts to “not [fit] the arrangement.”<sup>528</sup> She ended by saying, “[They] sound like [two] different things at once (too busy or dry [as f\*\*k]).”<sup>529</sup> There was a

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<sup>527</sup> Passion Is..., “Talk That Talk - Episode 34 DRUMLINE: The Percussion Show,” video, 20:45, YouTube, April 6, 2022, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sPOxfJXjLDI>.

<sup>528</sup> Comment, “Talk That Talk - Episode 34 DRUMLINE: The Percussion Show.”

<sup>529</sup> Ibid.

consensus on the panel that the bond with the drumline should continuously be nurtured if the collaboration process is to be successful.

As a student arranger, Evan Garner says he has not yet written his own percussion parts but is “fiddin’ to start,” because he has found that a spirit of collaboration is not automatically established. He is unsure if the required percussion methods class he needs to take as a music major will be helpful, because he is unaware if aspects of percussion arranging will be covered, but still wants more control over what he hears.

I probably have to ask a few percussion majors. What is this? How do I do this? As far as parts, that’s comin’ down the line very soon. All of my arrangements from now on are actually going to have drum parts because sometimes the drumline, they’ll hear something... For example, “Heaven Can Wait,” by Michael Jackson. It’s a real... smooth song. It don’t make no sense [that] the snares are playin’ hi-hat parts as if it was a Lil Baby song... [I] feel like this is everywhere – all schools... I was talkin’ to a girl from Miles [College]. She said, “We just make up parts as we go as well.” I was just like, “Ah man!” ...I’m definitely gonna start writing drum parts.<sup>530</sup>

There is a movement with many arrangers and educators to do as Evan is suggesting. They want to make sure African-American percussionists can read at an elevated level, defying a stereotype of illiteracy, which has historically been used as an excuse to prevent Black drummers from securing recording studio work. Not all situations call for the collaborative process to take place. In such scenarios, instructors are not against students contributing to the creative process, but they don’t assume all of them are up to the task either. Marie A. Douglas’s commitment to her former students was demonstrated via “making a generation of literate African-American percussionists,” because she too is aware of the stereotype. Trenton Hunter communicated to all his former middle school students that music literacy equaled independence. Even if church

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<sup>530</sup> Garner, interview with author.

drummers don't always read, the legacy of Black formally trained musicians is one of music literacy.

Returning to my memories of the JSU band of the early 1990s, Mr. Adams arranged "Lift Every Voice and Sing" (1900) as a fanfare in 1993. That same year Mr. William Beathea was hired as percussion instructor and Assistant Band Director. He developed a system of writing for arrangements, but also allowed room for students to create on their own. He wanted the parts to mirror the recordings closer than what he was hearing. Mr. Beathea explains the changes he implemented for War and Thunder after his arrival:

My job as a teacher and an instructor is to empower the students, so that they are able to maintain based off what you showed them, themselves...I would like to think that I developed War and Thunder's musicianship in terms of drumming, and I enhanced the musicianship in terms of arrangements played to songs. When I got there, there was like four or five patterns that they knew very well. Whatever song came out, they would just put one of their patterns to the song...What I tried to do is every time Mr. Adams wrote something or some arrangement came out, I was writing. So when War and Thunder hooked up, it's gonna feel and sound like the real song, because we captured the rhythmic content to it.<sup>531</sup>

Some of his description omits the process of Lumark Gulley, which Mr. Beathea may be unaware of, but it was true that when the section was left to our own devices, ideas would be repeated. During my first year playing quads, there was even a pattern that I learned that could be used on, quote, "any G\*\* D\*\*n song." The collaborative process Mr. Beathea fostered included students creating a style of writing that was encouraged by, but not dependent on him. He explained the process of JSU debuting the Kenya Henderson arrangement of "The Show" (1986) in 1993.

I was there the year "The Show" came out. I was in the band room when we was puttin' that together...Shaun Darby was section leader at that time. I walked in and said, "Shaun, y'all need some help with this?" He said, "Mr. Beathea we got it. We got it." By that time, I had been writing, and our style was "it's got to

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<sup>531</sup> Indie Friendly, "Director of Bands: Norfolk State University – Professor William Beathea | Indie friendly Conversation," video, 16:39, YouTube, February 25, 2022, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PTZv-LI8Les>.

sound like the record.” By the time I got in that band room, them boys had it. We threw them patterns away. Everything now is it’s got to sound like the record and it’s got to feel good.<sup>532</sup>

The combination of values and processes that Mr. Beathea is mentioning – needing the drum parts to feel good, using the ear to craft parts that mimic the recording or reading parts written by him, and students having the autonomy to add their own ideas – is the mixture of procedures that works well for many in the bandworld. It is reflective of the multitude of abilities that have traditionally been sought after in high-level environments for Black musical output, and this atmosphere exists as another link between Black band culture and commercial music pursuits.

## **Conclusion**

There is a strong tradition of arranging within the Black bandworld that elevates these writers within this music culture differently than in the commercial music industry. It is a unique environment, as Banfield argues, that supports a set of customs that also exists across the marching arts, although very differently. The connection that show-style bands have to the taste of the African-American populace dictates that Hip-Hop be used as source material to create custom arrangements for various performance situations outside of just stand tunes, and that they must be written in a style that is palatable for this audience. Music publishing companies may be asking for stock arrangements of the repertoire to be written for a clientele whose shifting taste makes them marketable, but they largely do not employ the community of writers who specialize in this material.

It’s true that Hip-Hop arrangements written for marching bands can be formulaic, but most commercial music, using the track and hook method of songwriting, is rhythmically

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<sup>532</sup> Ibid., 59:40.

constructed, instead of melodically and harmonically driven. Having to use one's imagination to create something interesting has led to motivic composition becoming a required skill, which some arrangers relish and others reject. Different modes of learning – autodidacticism, peer-based learning, or direct or indirect influence from instructors – can help arrangers to those ends. However, even though studying music theory is the traditional step that some young arrangers may be trying to bypass, all writers of note at various levels in their journey have said that it is the most important. Being well versed in music production software is a new step that is perhaps also adding fresh ideas.

The subculture of percussion within band culture is ubiquitous in the marching arts. In the Black bandworld, because of the way arrangements get written, or the preference to focus squarely on the woodwinds and brass, percussion parts get created through the spirit of collaboration. This cooperative approach is representative of the arranger's place in the bandworld, which is to be the creator of content and the connection to the wider culture of Black musicking. It is through arrangers' lens, their imaginativeness, and their musicality that band music has transformed into a Black genre.

## EPILOGUE

The African-American bandworld continues to move and grow, with people having various ideas as to what future directions should be. After my last research trip in June of 2023, video content showed the continued growth of summer band activity. The King of the Midwest Battle of the Bands took place between the Chicago Mass Band and the Motor City Heat. Band media producer Killa Kev is from Detroit, and he was on hand to record the event. There was also a battle between the Dallas Legion All-Star Band and the Louisiana Leadership Institute. I wasn't clear if this was the same group who organized the Dallas Mass Band or a separate set of people. It remains to be seen if all these organizations that participate in summer battles will unite under one banner to hold events. I feel that the Drum Corps Associates (DCA) might be an organizational model to follow because it is an all-ages circuit. This means that the number of collegiate members could delineate how the division could be structured, but I have not heard any discussion concerning this matter. What remains impressive is that most educators involved with summer band continue to volunteer their time for this activity, and sometimes contribute their own money, along with members, for logistical purposes.

A video created and posted in July of 2023 featured a young man who traveled from Oceanside, California, to Tallahassee, Florida, to take part in the Florida A&M Marching 100 High School Band Camp. The interviewer was curious as to how he came to be there from such a distance. The young man shared that his mother was an alumna of the school and she suggested that he attend. In a separate video created by the North Carolina A&T Blue and Gold Marching Machine media team, incoming members of the drumline, who hail from Germany, are talking about the transition from playing in a show-style section at home to joining Cold Steel and enrolling at an HBCU. Many of these ensembles are displaying their reach, but in research on the

marching arts as an activity, there is still a sense that playing, teaching, or arranging for show-style ensembles is related to some type of underground or counter-cultural pursuit.

Ezra Brown, tenor saxophonist, coffee shop owner, and my former roommate, has always had the ability to mix culture and business. As was alluded to in Chapter 4, there aren't any instrumental method books, or instruction books, in arranging tailored for this style of band. His idea is for those of us inside the culture to create and market these manuals before someone from the outside publishes them. I don't know if cranking would become an acceptable manner of writing or performance practice if it was codified in a book, but it would have to become acknowledged as an approach. Currently, the talk from Ezra and some others primarily deals with show-style percussion methods and written cadences for beginners. It is true that African Americans can be reactionary in these situations – often waiting until some person or entity outside of said cultural activity claims space or receives attention before we realize how to maximize its value.

Keeping in line with the yard–neighborhood connection addressed in Chapter 1, I want to understand how this transpires in California by investigating historical and present displays of show-style presentation in the state. The majorette squads and children of HBCU alumni would qualify, but so would the Marching Saints of Locke High School of the 70s and 80s, who counted Patrice Rushen as a flutist. My younger cousin was a member of The Heartbeat Music and Arts Academy. This organization meets in the Encanto area of San Diego. The instructors are dedicated to teaching students as young as elementary school in HBCU inspired drumline and majorette skills. Mostly, I am interested in all aspects of the Pittsburg High School Marching Show Band, in Pittsburg, California. When they play “Yay Area” (2006), by E-40, and “Blow the Whistle” (2006), by Too \$hort, they demonstrate a musical bond with the vicinity. Where did

their band director go to college? Who's writing those arrangements? Is the battle culture and sense of aggression ingrained into the students if they never have other groups to battle against? These are the questions I hope to ask.

The intricacies in music and movement with majorette dance teams is an area I feel I can assist with, but as a research project, it really needs the attention of a dance scholar, with a background in the style. This portion of Black marching arts culture continues to create mainstream moments, with the viral attention garnered by the University of Southern California Cardinal Divas being the latest example. Also happening in California, the media storm that followed the Divas receiving all of their praise fueled frustrations felt by many in the Black bandworld, due to a newly formed PWI squad being showcased in a manner that HBCU teams have not. Many reactions and responses failed to display the nuance needed to contextualize this occurrence properly, with people instead choosing to villainize the young lady who founded the team, but the team members themselves not realizing, and being unprepared for, the role of cultural bearer that was hoisted upon them. I was informed by band media fixture Justin Patterson that the San Diego State University Diamonds, a team formed before the Cardinal Divas, will be hosting a majorette expo that he will film and later post. I'm curious about what the reaction is going to be after this event takes place.

I'm also interested in building on the work of Dr. Darryl Marc Singleton. His research into Hispanic students in Texas participating in show-style bands prompted me to wonder if said involvement could prepare them for playing Banda. Students who were exposed to Banda as youth feel the sound of show-style bands are comparable, which may make them want to join. The presence of Jennifer Guzman, who is a young, Latina woman, and was also tuba section leader in the Texas Southern Ocean of Soul, turned heads during the 2022 season, with her

dominant sound and solid leadership over the section. Tuba, being gendered male, and being an instrument of prestige in both show-style and Banda traditions, is an interesting link I wanted to make in this dissertation. Hopefully, I can pursue this direction at a later date.

I did not expect the marching arts to figure so prominently into my life as a researcher. Now that I am older, and with scholarly training, I analyze my own attraction to this communal music-making activity, not just for the enjoyment, but also because I was a child who didn't make friends easily. I know that participating in marching band was also the means for forging lifelong friendships, and doing research into the marching arts can continue to yield fascinating data in areas outside of music education.

## Appendix 1

### HBCUs and their Corresponding Bands Mention in this Study

I list names, nicknames, and abbreviations of only the institutions and their corresponding marching bands mentioned in this study. I separate them according to athletic conference affiliation. All institutions and bands that are affiliated with non-HBCU conferences will be listed together.

#### The Southwestern Athletic Conference (SWAC)

University	Band
Alabama A&M University	Maroon and White Band
Alabama State University: ASU	Alabama State University Mighty Marching Hornets
Alcorn State University	Sounds of Dyn-O-Mite
Bethune-Cookman University: BCU	Marching Wildcat Band
Florida A&M University: FAMU	The Marching 100
Grambling State University: GSU	Grambling State University Marching Tiger Band
Jackson State University: JSU	Jackson State University Marching Band: The Sonic Boom of the South, Da Boom
Mississippi Valley State University: Valley	Mississippi Valley State University Marching Band: Mean Green Marching Machine
Prairie View A&M University: PVAMU	PVAMU Marching Storm
Southern University of Baton Rouge: Southern, SU	Southern University Marching Band: The Human Jukebox
Texas Southern University: TxSU	TxSU Marching Band: The Ocean of Soul

The Mid-Eastern Athletic Conference (MEAC)

<b>University</b>	<b>Band</b>
Howard University: HU	Howard University Showtime Marching Band
Morgan State University	Morgan State University Magnificent Marching Machine
Norfolk State University: Norfolk, NSU	NSU Marching Band: The Spartan Legion
North Carolina Central University: NCCU	NCCU Sound Machine Marching Band
South Carolina State University: SCSU	SCSU Marching 101

Southern Intercollegiate Athletic Conference (SIAC)

<b>University</b>	<b>Band</b>
Albany State University	Albany State University Golden Rams Marching Show Band
Benedict College	Marching Tiger Band of Distinction
Clark Atlanta University	Clark Atlanta University Mighty Marching Panther Band
Fort Valley State University: FVSU	FVSU Blue Machine Marching Band
Kentucky State University	Mighty Marching Thorobreds
Miles College	The Purple Marching Machine
Morehouse College	Morehouse College Marching Band: House of Funk
Tuskegee University	Marching Crimson Pipers

The Central Intercollegiate Athletic Association (CIAA)

University	Band
Bowie State University	Bowie State University Symphony of Soul
Fayetteville State University: FSU	FSU Marching Bronco 'Xpress
Virginia State University: VSU	VSU Trojan Explosion Marching Band

Non-HBCU Conference Institutions and Bands

University	Band
Hampton University: HU	Hampton University Marching Force
Langston University	Langston University Band: Marching Pride
Louisiana State University: LSU (PWI)	LSU Tiger Marching Band
Morris Brown College	Marching Wolverines (inactive)
North Carolina A&T University: NCAT	Blue and Gold Marching Machine
Talladega College	Great Tornado Band
Tennessee State University: TnSU	TnSU Marching Band: The Aristocrat of Bands

## Appendix 2

### Secondary School Band Programs, Summer Bands, Independent Programs

I list names of schools and/or band programs mentioned in this study, as well as their location.

#### Secondary School Programs

High School	Band	Location
Booker T. Washington High School	Booker T. Washington High School Band	Tulsa, OK
Central High School	Mighty Warrior Band	Memphis, TN
Dyer County High School	Sound of the Choctaws	Newburn, TN
Edna Karr High School	Edna Karr High School Band: Team Bust Em Up	New Orleans, LA
George Washington Carver High School	George Washington Carver High School Band	New Orleans, LA
Jim Hill High School	Marching Band of Distinction	Jackson, MS
Miami Norland Senior High School	Miami Norland Marching Vikings	Miami, FL
Minor High School	Sounds of Superior	Adamsville, AL
Northeast Early College High School	Soul Raider Marching Band	Austin, TX
Snowden Middle School	Snowden Marching Band	Memphis, TN
St. Augustine High School	Marching 100	New Orleans, LA
St. Mary's Academy	Mighty Marching Maryites	New Orleans, LA
Whitehaven High School	Sounds of Perfection	Memphis, TN

Community Organizations/Summer Band

Summer Band Name	Location
Alabama Mass Band	Alabama
Austin All-Star Band	Texas
Chicago Mass Band	Illinois
Dallas Legion All-Star Band	Texas
Dallas Mass Band (inactive)	Texas
Georgia Mass Band: GAMB	Georgia
The Louisiana Leadership Institute	Louisiana
Magnolia All-Stars	Mississippi
The Memphis Mass Band	Tennessee
Michigan Elite	Michigan
Motor City Heat	Michigan
New Orleans All-Star Band: NOASB	Louisiana
The Regulators	Louisiana
The Roots of Music	Louisiana

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