

Black College-Radio on Predominantly White Campuses: A ‘Hip-Hop Era’ Student-Authored Inclusion Initiative

by

Anthony Kwame Harrison, Ph.D.
Associate Professor of Sociology
Virginia Tech University
anharr5@vt.edu

Anthony Kwame Harrison is the Gloria D. Smith Professor of Africana Studies at Virginia Tech. He is author of *Hip Hop Underground: The Integrity and Ethics of Racial Identification* (Temple University Press, 2009), and has published widely in the field of popular music studies. Kwame teaches classes on the African American experience, social theory, qualitative research methods, and Black aesthetics. His research interests include, hip hop historiography, racialized social space, and Black leisure activities.

Abstract:

In this article, I advocate for the importance of Black-music-oriented spaces in fostering sentiments of belonging among Black students at predominantly white institutions. In doing this, I focus on the historical example of Black-music-oriented college-radio programming—or ‘Black college-radio’—during a period that I call ‘college radio’s hip-hop era’ (circa 1980 to 1993). I begin by discussing the under-acknowledged role of college radio in hip hop history. I next highlight the ‘college radio hip-hop era’ as a particularly tumultuous time for Black students on predominantly white college campuses. Through revisiting some of the history of racial incidents on college campuses during the late 1980s, I demonstrate the lack of conviction and/or preparation on the part of university administrations in dealing with diversity issues. Finally, I show how Black college-radio, as a student-authored inclusion initiative, both cultivated and sustained a sense of belonging for Black students at PWIs. In conclusion, I argue that this example can serve as a model for addressing today’s inclusion and diversity challenges.

Keywords: College Radio, Hip Hop, Black Students, Predominantly White Institutions, Diversity and Inclusion.

Introduction¹

The Civil Rights reforms of the 1960s opened the door for Black students to attend Predominantly White Institutions (PWIs) in greater numbers. Thus began a fifty-year struggle to gain equitable representation on historically white campuses, as well as to achieve the academic and overall success that matriculation in these institutions was thought to bring about. Despite the fact that in 2013 Black students made up fourteen percent of the student population of four-year career-granting colleges and universities—up from eleven percent in 1994 (McGill, 2015)—a significant gap between Black and White graduation rates persists (Casselman, 2014). In addition, recent events like the 2015 University of Missouri protests and Black Lives Matter movement on college campuses strongly suggest that, from the perspective of many Black students, most PWIs maintain unwelcoming campus climates.

In this article, I advocate for the importance of Black-music-oriented spaces at PWIs. To do this, I focus on a specific, yet largely overlooked, historical example: the case of Black-music-oriented college-radio programming—hereafter referred to as ‘Black college-radio’²—on predominantly white campuses during a period that I call ‘college radio’s hip-hop era’ (circa 1980 to 1993). I maintain that, during these pivotal years, Black college-radio functioned as a student-authored diversity initiative. This historical example, I argue, should be looked at as a model for considering how the promotion of Black-music-oriented spaces on campus can play a central role in fostering Black student engagement, satisfaction, and ultimately success.

In the following pages, I lay out three key discussions that, together, support this position. First, I discuss the significance of Black college-radio programming, most notably hip-hop programming, in the history of college radio. Second, I highlight the period that I refer to as ‘college radio’s hip-hop era’ as a particularly tumultuous time for Black students on predominantly white college campuses. Third, I show how Black college-radio both cultivated and sustained a sense of belonging for Black students at PWIs, which, I maintain, helped to facilitate their satisfaction and success—albeit in ways that are difficult to measure. I conclude by arguing that, despite the waning significance of college radio in the lives of students today, this historical example can animate new ways of addressing current inclusion and diversity challenges by underscoring the value of Black-music-oriented spaces in creating robust Black campus communities.

College Radio and Hip Hop

For over a century the Black intellectual tradition in America has been propelled by the goal of social transformation through scholar activism. Yet, during the late 1960s and early 1970s, when many Black Studies programs were first established, their articulated agendas were as much corrective as they were transformative. Standard American education had largely ignored the experiences and contributions of Black people; when they were presented it was through a frameworks of social pathology. Speaking in 1969, anthropologist St. Clair Drake asserted:

The very use of the term Black Studies is by implication an indictment of America and Western European scholarship. It makes the bold assertion that what we have heretofore called “objective” intellectual activities were actually white studies in perspective and content; and that a corrective bias, a shift in emphasis, is needed, even if something called “truth” is set as the goal. (cited in Marable, 2000, p. 21)

This demand for recognition in the face of Eurocentric standards of education led many early Black Studies programs to prioritize cultural topics like literature, art, and history ahead of the social sciences. Scholars working in Black Studies today, continue to identify and ‘call out’ spaces and fields where Black experiences have gone unnoticed or ignored. One such arena is the emerging scholarship on college radio, which for all intents and purposes has been whitewashed of the existence of Black-music-oriented programming.³

Although university-based radio stations have a long history in the United States (Saul, 2000), the distinct brand of ‘freeform’ music programing that contemporary listeners recognize as ‘college radio’ developed during the 1960s (Wall, 2007). The ‘college radio movement’ was very much a response to the dominant music radio mainstream that came of age during the post-war era. Since their emergence, college radio stations have variously blended priorities of anti-format broadcasting, cultural uplift content, and non-commercial altertnity (Wall, 2007, p. 40). These combined to form an alternative ethos surrounding college radio, which gets regularly referenced in both its scholarship and everyday conversations about it.

College radio programming is typically organized according to an “open format,” daily block (certain genres/themes during certain times of the day) or weekly patchwork (certain genres/themes during certain time-slots each week) structure—thus enabling students, and sometimes community members, to DJ weekly shows in line with their particular musical tastes (Wallace, 2008). The result is an eclectic mix of genres, with the consistent aim to offer music that is not regularly heard on commercial radio stations.

Yet referring to the scholarship on college radio as ‘whitewashed’ is somewhat of an overstatement. It is perhaps more accurate to say it observes what music writer Jody Rosen (2009) calls the ‘D.O.R.F. matrix’ —that is, it focuses on dead, old, retro, and foreign Black artists and genres such as jazz, world music, reggae, and (sometimes) blues. What is missing are the music genres regularly listened to by Black college-aged youth. Although one could argue that Black youth are among the paramount taste-makers of what becomes popular music, therefore making their music preferences (genres like R&B, neo soul, and hip hop) too commercial for college radio, I agree with Guthrie P. Ramsey’s (2003) observation that, “because of its association with the ‘black-folk-vernacular,’” Black music is perpetually “Othered” (p. 19). Even with the commercial successes of numerous contemporary Black artists, there are consistently scores of musicians with sizable followings among Black listeners who fail to garner mainstream recognition. Furthermore, and specific to my argument here, there is a long history within the United States of emerging Black music forms being initially rejected and disdained by the music establishment (Hall, 1997). This can be seen in the initial reception of blues, ragtime, jazz, b-bop, and rock ‘n’ roll. But the most prominent example over the last fifty years—the most significant genre to emerge in the post-Civil Rights and college radio eras—is hip hop or rap.⁴

For at least its first decade as a recorded music form, hip hop was alternative music. The first recorded rap songs appeared in late 1979: The Fatback Band’s “King Tim III (personality jock)” and the Sugar Hill Gang’s “Rapper’s Delight.” Yet it was not until 1989 that the music industry recognized rap music by giving the genre its own Grammy Award and *Billboard* chart (Harrison and Arthur, 2011). Although a handful of popular rap hits were released during this ten-year period,⁵ rap music was still alternative enough—by commercial radio standards—that many of the most prominent artists within the hip hop community received little to no commercial radio airplay. With the exception of a handful of major metropolitan radio outlets, during this time, college radio was the only place to hear rap music on the radio. Both college radio and college-campus touring circuits played important roles in supporting and promoting hip hop throughout the 1980s—a period when icons like Run-DMC, Eric B & Rakim, KRS-One, and Public Enemy all emerged. Accordingly, I refer to the 1980s and early 90s as the ‘college radio hip-hop era.’

Hip hop college radio shows might not have commenced with the 1979 release of “Rappers Delight.” But by the mid-1980s there were weekly hip hop programs on campus stations throughout the country, including: at the University of Massachusetts at Amherst (WMUA 91.1FM), the University of Connecticut (WHUS 91.7 FM), Penn State University (WPSU 91.5 FM), the University of Washington (KCMU 90.5 FM), and the University of California, Riverside (KUCR 88.3FM), to name just a few.⁶ By introducing young listeners outside of urban areas to rap music, college radio played an under-acknowledged role in hip hop’s national spread. The invisibility of hip-hop music in college radio scholarship is remarkable if for no other reason because hip hop has garnered so much attention in the broader fields of popular music studies and education.

Yet this omission goes both ways in that, with a few exceptions (see, for example, Forman, 2002; Foster & Marshall, 2015), college radio is hardly mentioned in the prevailing hip hop studies scholarship. College radio continued to play a key role in hip hop's growth through the 1990s. In the documentary *Stretch and Bobbito: Radio that Changed Lives*—which tells the story of the 1990s Columbia University radio (WKCR 89.9 FM) program that many regard as the “most important hip hop radio show ever” (Petchauer, 2012, p. 31)—Lord Sear describes “college radio . . . [as] the incubator and feeder to commercial rap success” (Acosta, 2015). During the 1980s college radio was more than an incubator. With few commercial radio outlets playing hip hop, college radio was virtually all there was.

Black Students, White Campuses

The challenges facing Black students in predominantly white institution have been widely discussed (see, for example, Allen, 1988; Feagin et al., 1996; Baker, 2013). In this section, I revisit a specific series of incidents, concerns, and studies that occurred during the mid-to-late 1980s. In developing my argument about Black college-radio programming during the ‘college radio hip-hop era,’ I want to highlight this period as a moment when it became abundantly clear that PWI campuses and administrations were ill-equipped to deal with the racial tensions that would accompany sustained integration.

The Black students who attended PWIs during the 1980s have been characterized as a generation removed from the Black Freedom Movements (Civil Rights and Black Power) of the 1960s and early 70s. Here, I locate this generation as sandwiched between two important moments in higher education diversity. The first of these is the 1978 *University of California vs. Bakke* Supreme Court Decision—described as “the first decisive legal step away from affirmative action and race-based ‘quotas’” (Marable 2000, p. 26). The *Bakke* decision brought debates over affirmative action to the national stage, and in the ensuing conservative political climate, came to mark the beginning of a gradual rollback against inclusive admissions policies. The second, less precisely dated, moment in higher education diversity is the ‘arrival’ of substantial multicultural curriculum initiatives, which occurred sometime in the 1990s. Although diversity curriculum requirements started appearing in the 1980s (the first was actually at Denison University in 1979 [Board, 2010]), it was during the 1990s—amidst a wave of momentum surrounding multicultural education—that they became a common feature of the higher education landscape. According to a 2000 national survey, seventy-five percent of the colleges and universities reporting to have diversity requirements established them during the 1990s (Humphreys, 2000). Thus, prior to the nineties, a different diversity climate existed, with the vast majority of schools—approximately ninety-percent (Board, 2010)—not having diversity considerations as a strong aspect of their administrative structures or educational requirements.

The *Bakke* decision initiated what Walter R. Allen (1988) describes as a “redirection of university priorities from an emphasis on [growing a diverse student body] to an emphasis on more restrictive admissions criteria” (p. 187). During a nine-year period from 1967 to 1976, the number of Black college students in higher education increased 247 percent (Aitken, 1986)—with the majority of this increase being seen in PWIs (Allen, 1988). Among these PWIs, it was particularly in public colleges and universities—large state schools that were more affordable and that tended to offer a range of academic programs—where the greatest increases were seen (Allen, 1988). Yet following a peak in 1980, the number of Black students attending four-year institutions began dropping (Horn & Maw, 1995).

Richard Lowy situates this decline in the Black student population within the context of a resurgence in American racism. Writing in 1991, Lowy uses the term “yuppie racism,” to describe the “interaction of individual perceptions, attitudes, beliefs, and ideological constructs with social structural arrangements,” which allowed many young well-educated Americans to presume racism was no longer prevalent despite the perpetuation and, in many cases, expansion of race-based inequalities (Lowy, 1991, p. 453). For Lowy, the appearance of yuppie racism was directly connected to the policies of the Reagan administration: first, through the eroding of social programs and civil rights legislation (p. 446); and, second, through promoting an economic ideology that celebrated individual upward mobility, financial prosperity, materialism, and consumerism (p. 448). With higher education existing as a primary site for generating the knowledge, skills, and social capital that enables individuals to access these economic aspirations, it also became a battleground where overt and covert conflicts as to who could rightfully pursue them would play out.

Many of the large state schools that increased their Black student populations following Civil Rights reforms had additional characteristics, which contributed to the potential for racial conflict on their campuses. Walter C. Farrell and Cloyzelle Jones (1988) identify campus isolation (along with large enrollment) as a key risk factor associated with the rise in racial tension on predominantly white campuses during the 1980s. Indeed, a significant proportion of large state universities are located in small, overwhelmingly white, college towns, where Black students do not have the option of seeking refuge in a local Black community.⁷ Such a setting increases the likelihood of Black students encountering, what Farrell and Jones (1988) call, “environmental racism” in local establishments like restaurants, bars, and movie theaters (p. 218). Such environmental racism can also come from local police forces and public officials.

Two additional factors that Farrell and Jones identify as contributing to the increase in racial incidents during this period were: (1) white insensitivity coming from students, faculty, and staff who had little previous contact with non-white people (1988, p. 215);⁸ and (2) the shifting characteristics of majority and minority students. This second factor involves a complex interplay of social class, and attitudes and convictions regarding who belongs on college campuses. By the 1980s, access to higher education was open to increasing numbers of first generation, poor white students.

This group—described as “one of the more racially intolerant groups in society” (Farrell & Jones, 1988, p. 219)—was ripe to embrace many of the tenets of the post-*Bakke* backlash, which notably introduced vocabularies of ‘reverse racism,’ ‘special treatment,’ ‘free rides,’ and ‘affirmative action students’ into the white lexicon. At the same time, many of the Black students enrolling in PWIs entered with “new frames of cultural and social reference” (p. 219) marked by ambition and an historically unprecedented level of assertiveness. As byproducts of the prior decades’ Black Freedom Movements, these students “refus[ed] to accommodate social, physical, and cultural assaults on their humanity” (p. 220). Still, coming from segregated communities and high schools where they were usually the majority—and being away from home for the first time—many Black students were not prepared for the subtle and, at times, overt hostilities coming from the overwhelming mass of white students they encountered.

The mid-to-late 1980s saw a considerable rise in racist incidents on predominantly white college campuses. This resurgence of racism was documented in numerous articles and reports.⁹ The National Institute Against Prejudice and Violence documented “250 racial incidents involving physical violence or serious psychological assault on college campuses between 1986 and 1990” (Feagin et al., 1996, pp. 60-61).¹⁰ Below, I detail a few of the earliest incidents in this timeline as a way to shed light on the overall racial climate at many PWIs at the time (for Black campus communities throughout the country would most likely be aware of these newsworthy incidents):

October, 1986, at the University of Massachusetts (Amherst): following a Boston Red Sox loss to the New York Mets in the seventh game of the World Series, a series long rivalry between white Red Sox fans and Black Mets fans on a particular dormitory floor erupted in violence; according to police reports, “a heated exchange ensued . . . [and] soon intensified into a stampede of 500 to 1,000 white students chasing 6 to 10 black students.” (Williams, 1986; Levine, 1987).¹¹

October, 1986, at The Citadel (Charleston, South Carolina): five white students wearing sheets and carrying a burning paper cross entered the dorm room of a Black freshman cadet shouting racial epithets at him (Curry, 1987; Levine, 1987); notably, the administration initially tried to deny that the incident had been racial (Aitken, 1986).

October, 1986, at the State University of New York (Albany): two Black students found a sign posted on their dorm room door reading, “We Don’t Want Niggers on Our Floor. Leave tomorrow or die” (Curry, 1987).

January, 1987, at Purdue University (West Lafayette, Indiana): a cross was burned in front of the Black Cultural Center; two weeks later, the words “Death Nigger” were carved on a Black administrator’s office door (Marable, 1987; Mitgang, 1987).

January, 1987, at the University of Michigan (Ann Arbor): a flyer declaring “open hunting season” on Black students was circulated; two months later, 35 neo-Nazis displaying swastikas held a white supremacy rally in Ann Arbor (Marable, 1987).

In many of these instances, racial tensions were escalated by the attention campus communities were giving to South Africa apartheid, which included Black (and other) student groups calling for universities to divest. For instance, at both Johns Hopkins University and the University of Texas at Austin, shanties erected in protest of South African apartheid were burned down (Levine, 1987). At Texas, the perpetrators, who called themselves the “Aryan Collegiates,” vowed to rid the campus of “outsoken minorities” (Aitken, 1986).

Whereas these newsworthy incidents garnered national attention, Black students at PWIs faced equally insidious forms of everyday racism (Essed, 1991), which are undoubtedly under-reported. Recently, the term *microaggressions*¹² has gained currency as a reference to “the brief and commonplace daily verbal, behavioral, and environmental indignities, whether intentional or unintentional, that communicate hostile, derogatory, or negative racial slights and insults to the target person or group” (Sue et al., 2007, p. 273). Microaggressions often appear to be so innocuous that they get little attention and may even lead to accusations of hyper-sensitivity. Yet their cumulative effect can significantly impact a person’s sense of belonging and self-esteem. Race-based microaggressions “stem from unconscious attitudes of white superiority and [accordingly] constitute a verification of Black inferiority” (Davis, 1989, p. 1576). These range from individual interactions, such as asking a Black student what sport they play (thus assuming they are only at a school due to athletics), to campus-community oversights, for example, failure to feature underrepresented students in the yearbook. Another form of microaggression is the indifference shown by majority white students, faculty, and administrators to racial incidents—which subtly sends the message that such behavior is tolerable and raises questions about the extent to which non-white community members are valued as part of the campus community.

Assumptions about inclusion and exclusion are implicit in the meanings given to spaces; and those who are in power, and have greater resources at their disposal, typically control how certain spaces are defined. Helán Page and R. Brooke Thomas (1994) coined the term *white public space* to refer to social spaces where “whites are invisibly normal, and in which racialized populations are visibly marginal and the objects of monitoring” (Hill, 1998, p. 683). In a study of Black students at a large, ‘typical,’ predominantly white university, Feagin et al. (1996) found that students regularly characterized their campus as a *white public space*, using social descriptors like “hostile,” “alien,” and “white” to convey feelings of out-of-place-ness (p. 15).

During the years that mark the ‘college radio hip-hop era’—circa 1980 to 1993—predominantly white institutions, as white public spaces, were structured to compel Black students to assimilate towards white cultural norms and/or accept their position as racial subordinates in order to succeed (Feagan et al., 1996, p. 20). Amidst a conservative political climate that permeated the everyday interactions they had on campus, Black students could not rely on administrators to be supportive and/or experienced in dealing with race-related diversity issues.

Few PWIs had core curriculums, support programs, or university missions that recognized and valued the presence of Black students. In the next section, I present Black college-radio as a student-led initiative that helped to establish and fortify the place of Black communities on predominantly white college campuses during this time.

Black College-Radio: A Student-Authored Inclusion Initiative

At a time when institutions were slow to adjust their organizational structures and curriculum requirements, when university administrators, by and large, lacked the conviction and insight to institute effective inclusivity measures, Black college-radio represented a central node in a Black student support network. Black students, through their involvement in and around college radio programming, authored their own means of supporting one another and alleviating feelings of isolation. In this section, I consider the role of Black college-radio in creating and maintaining a sense of community among Black students and beyond. Additionally, I reflect on the undertheorized power of music and sound—something I am calling *sonic belonging*—in carving out spaces of Blackness on historically white college campuses.

Writing in 2011, Jared Ball (2011) explained how even in the twenty-first century, radio “remains the primary and most pervasive medium for Black Americans” (p. 101). In making this claim, Ball cites a *2008 Black Radio Today Report* stating that “well over 90 percent of Black consumers age 12 and over listen to the radio each week—a higher penetration than television, magazines, newspapers, or the Internet” (p. 213n.489). Radio, and the Black personalities featured on it, have played central roles in coordinating African-American consumer and protest activity throughout history. In the 1950s, when middle-class white households were transitioning to television as their primary medium of home entertainment, Black households remained radio focused (Newman, 2000). Throughout the Jim Crow era, Black radio DJs promoted businesses that welcomed Black customers; and with the rising visibility of Black consumers, starting in the late 1940s, this power to recommend local businesses and national brands, was instrumental in fueling Civil Rights boycotts (Newman, 2000). Black radio DJs, then, have a long standing record of civic leadership in Black communities, and have played an essential part in cultivating a sense of solidarity as distinct from the larger white community.

Black college-radio shows—fitting within the block or patchwork framework of college radio scheduling (see above)—created slices of Black radio for students (and others) to regularly tune in to. This was accomplished in various ways. In researching this article, I listened to roughly a dozen audiocassette tapes of Black college-radio programs from the late 1980s and early 1990s. Almost all these programs were on WMUA 91.1FM (the University of Massachusetts at Amherst), and WHUS 91.7FM (the University of Connecticut at Storrs)—the two college radio stations that, during those years, were regularly within my listening range.¹³ The DJs whose programs I regularly tuned in to and taped include: P.Zo Pete, Kevy Kev, Rockin Renz, Mixmaster Daddy Neal, and Long Al on WMUA, and Doc 9 on WHUS.

Although I cannot definitively claim that this is a representative sample of Black college-radio at the time, both campuses are representative of the large-state PWIs discussed throughout this article. Whereas some of these pause-mix-tapes were made with the intention of editing out ‘DJ talk,’ in reviewing them I particularly focused on such on-air talking—and found ample instances of it. While the majority of DJ talk was done by the DJs themselves, the category also includes talk from in-station guests and people calling in. What follows is an admittedly partial list of some of the ways in which, beyond playing Black music, these Black college-radio programs were crucial to the creation and sustenance of Black communities on these predominantly white campuses. This list can certainly be expanded. It is offered here as an initial way of thinking about Black college-radio’s community-building practices. One common feature on this list is the ‘*shout out*,’—which I understand as a public recognition and statement of appreciation. Although ‘*shout outs*’ draws from traditions of Black vernacular performance (see Baraka, 1963), I see them becoming particularly popularized through hip-hop music and culture.

Black Community-Radio’s (non-musical) Community-Building Practices:

- Public Service Announcements to the Black community—including pre-recorded skits focusing on topics such as safe sex and HIV awareness.
- Announcing formal events on campus and in the community—including organization meetings, educational forums, social functions, and community events.
- Announcing and/or *shouting out* informal (usually off campus) events—most often social get-togethers, sometimes inspired by people calling in either from the event or on their way to the event.
- *Shouting out* Black fraternities and sororities—often in conjunction with event announcements.
- *Shouting out* local businesses that support and/or cater to Black clientele—such as, nightclubs, (soul food) restaurants, and barber shops.¹⁴
- Announcing and/or *shouting out* sports teams, like basketball and football, that have a significant proportion of Black players—typically surrounding a game (i.e. ‘good luck,’ ‘congratulations,’ or ‘the coach blew it’).
- *Shouting out* specific individuals in, and friends of, the Black community—most often by name, however, there was one example where the DJ gave a *shout out* to “the loan brother doing work on the baseball team.”
- *Shouting out* dormitories or specific dormitory floors—presumably housing several Black students and/or friends of the Black community.

- *Shouting out* fellow underrepresented organizations (in the UMass example this was the ALANA community [African, Latino/a, Asian/Pacific Islander, and Native American]).
- Song dedications, holiday wishes, as well as *shouting out* sweethearts.
- End-of-the-year and/or end-of-the-semester *shout outs*, ‘good lucks,’ and ‘thank yous’ to fellow students (working on papers and studying for exams), professors, staff members, parents, and community members—‘thank yous’ were typically given by graduating seniors.
- Thought felt sentiments directed to specific individuals going through difficult times (for example, a family member passing)—in one instance a moment of silence was observed.
- Commentary and criticism on newsworthy events (for example, a recent movie or the 1992 L.A. Uprisings).
- Comments and criticism on the state of the campus Black community (on a few occasions offered in the form of poetry).
- In-station performances (as well as playing recorded songs) by students and members of the local community.
- *Shouting Out* radio give away winners and ‘Thank yous’ to the listeners.

My argument here is quite straightforward. Communities are created and maintained through overlapping nodes and networks that allow people to recognize one another (as mutual members of a community), become informed about what is going on and what matters to the community, as well as to dialogue and interact. For the rare Black student who was comfortable in a predominantly white setting, Black college-radio might have existed simply as a source of good music, or perhaps they didn’t even listen to Black music. But for students who defined their Blackness as meaningful, and found themselves on a majority white campus feeling “isolation, alienation, and lack[ing] peer support” (Farrell & Jones, 1988, p. 212), Black college-radio provided an essential means of connecting that facilitated further connections.¹⁵

Whereas it is easy to recognize how Black college-radio serves as a hub of information and community building for Black communities in and around PWIs, a less apparent, but I would argue equally important, function of Black college-radio was to create sonic spaces of Blackness on predominantly white campuses. Although the aforementioned Black ‘DJ talk’ was certainly an aspect of this, here I want to focus (mostly) on the power of Black music to represent a Black presence on campus and to redefine the meanings associated with campus spaces.¹⁶

As a basepoint for beginning this discussion, I highlight an important conceptual shift in popular music studies that reversed the traditional approach of looking at how music reflects people’s identities to, instead, thinking about how identities are produced through music-related activities (Frith, 1996; Ramsey, 2003).

While certainly Black students at PWIs would find pleasure in hearing familiar Black musical genres that they see as reflecting their cultural experiences, it is equally important to think about how, through these acts of listening to music, identities are created, experiences and memories are shared, and, ultimately, a pre-existing community based on common Blackness is more intimately integrated around shared (musical) experiences as Black people on a particular campus.

Key to my thinking here are Tia DeNora's ideas regarding music as, not simply a means of creating atmosphere, but also as a sonic force that defines social space and how people experience it. For DeNora (2000), "music may influence how people compose their bodies, how they conduct themselves, how they experience the passage of time, how they feel—in terms of energy and emotion—about themselves, about others, and about situations" (p. 17). Take, for example, Barry "Rockbarry" Benson's—who did a 1980s "rap show" at the University of California, Riverside—recollection of the Fat Boy's 1984 release "Can You Feel It":

The song stirs fond memories for me; this record would rock A & I dorm at U of Cal back in the day. With a drink in one hand and the hips of a Calvin Klein-tight-fitting-denim-clad female in the other, we found ourselves singing the song in almost chantlike diction. (Benson, 1997)

This experience of shared listening need not take place in a particular dorm room or campus event. It is also powerfully experienced as an 'imagined' communion, with other radio listeners across campus (see Anderson, 1991). These sentiments, of course, get amplified when those imagined others are specifically recognized through a radio *shout out*. Thus, when P.Zo Pete would get on the air and say, "I want to give a shout out to Kwame Harrison," he would further animate not only my listening experience but also the experience of anyone who knew me—whether they knew P.Zo or not. Suddenly through a mutual connection to me, we were all community. Clearly, then, this suggests the power of shared musical experiences to create community not just across campus but also extending beyond the campus to anyone listening.¹⁷

Practices of shared music listening can generate something akin to what Lauren Berlant (2008) calls *intimate publics*—that is, a profound sense of social belonging founded on the assumption that people "share a worldview and emotional knowledge that they have derived from a broadly common historical experience" (p. viii).¹⁸ Musically mediated environments cultivate intimate publics based on vague but powerful pre-existing identifications—for example, the idea that common identification as a Black person indicates common experiences and perspectives.

Yet it is through the in-the-moment experience of shared musical pleasure—‘chanting’ the words to “Can You Feel It” in a crowded dorm room, rejoicing in the third consecutive DJ playing LL Cool J’s “The Boomin’ System” as part of their set at a major campus event, or first hearing the lead single off of the new De La Soul album played across the campus radio airwaves—that these profound sentiments of belonging get most powerfully actualized. While such intense feelings are often fleeting, their bases in mutual recognition establish a foundation for more tangible community building (Shanks, 2014). Through creating networks of intimate public engagement on PWI campuses, then, Black college-radio during its hip hop era produced and maintained spaces of Black inclusivity.

These experiences of shared music enjoyment are foremost important to nurturing and sustaining a Black community on campus (and beyond). They can also be a germ for building friendships and coalitions across racial and ethnic lines—thus providing sonic points of mutual recognition for Black communities and allies. This is not to imply that everyone who enjoys Black music is a friend of the Black community—far from it. However, one of the principle ways in which those-who-come-to-be allies of the Black community access it, display their allegiance, and (in an era of political hip hop) even transform themselves into allies is through shared musical experiences. Space does not allow me to explore this topic any more than I have here. The role of Black college-radio in creating politicized cross-racial alliances and collaborations is a topic deserving of its own separate study.¹⁹

Finally, the amplification of Black music on predominantly white campuses, in addition to shifting the racialized composition of social spaces and fostering the development of an intimate Black community (along with allies), significantly marked a Black presence on campus. In other words, Black college-radio promoted audible/visible Blackness that unsettled hegemonic notions of campuses as exclusively white spaces.

Conclusion

In this article, I have used the example of Black college-radio, during the period I call ‘college radio’s hip-hop era’ (circa 1980 to 1993), to join a chorus of recent scholarship addressing the importance of social support in improving the success of Black collegians at predominantly white institutions. Yet where many studies advocate for top-down institutionally-organized support services, college radio, although supported by institutions, is largely administered by student programmers (Wallace, 2008).²⁰ As such, it represents a student-authored diversity initiative, which relies on certain institutional structures being in place, but also recognizes, as Emery Petchauer (2012) explains, the importance of “spaces and activities [that are] outside the [direct] gaze of faculty members and campus personnel” (p. 31). In her ethnographic study of WMUA—which included a passing mention of its “late evening” hip hop programs—Dickie Wallace (2008) laments the lack of professionalism surrounding the on-air “sounds of kids hanging around having a good time, laughing at in-jokes and giving repeated shout-outs to friends” (p. 50).

If the goal of college radio is professionalism, Wallace's critique is fair. Yet I would counter that, whether in the radio station or collectively listening in dormitories and cars, laughing among friends, sharing inside jokes, and recognizing others through 'shout outs' are essential practices of community-making; furthermore, when Black music and Black people are part of the mix, these are some of the most meaningful everyday moments in engendering a cohesive Black community within a predominantly white space.

In championing the importance of a strong Black community as a means to fostering resilience among Black students at PWIs, Kristine S. Lewis and Stephanie C. McKissic (2010) insist that the topic has been "underexamined and neglected" (p. 265). By spotlighting the example of Black college-radio as a galvanizing force within Black student communities during the 1980s and early 90s, I join Lewis and McKissic, extending their discussion to consider the part that music and musical spaces play in these processes. Black campus communities are "dynamic and contested space[s]" made up of students from different backgrounds, and with a range of aspirations and perspectives (p. 265). Accordingly, the spaces in which Black communities (on predominantly white campuses) exist and sustain themselves must be both inclusive and transformative. Music is distinct in its power to bring people together, raise individual and collective consciousness, and change the meanings and practices associated with social space. It therefore exists as a unique and underutilized resource on college campuses.

The 1980s mark an important historical moment in the history of Black student inclusion in PWIs. Yet, in framing this decade as part of the 'college radio hip-hop era,' I also mean to call attention to the potential of hip-hop-oriented spaces as sites of campus knowledge production. From its roots in college radio, hip hop has steadily established a place for itself on today's college campuses. The field of study hip-hop studies, for instance, incorporates both critical perspectives on society (for example, Jeffries, 2009; Bonnette, 2015) and pedagogical innovations (Hill, 2009; Arthur 2015). Still, hip hop's infusion into extracurricular campus spaces may be most consequential in terms of generating student engagement, satisfaction, and sentiments of belonging (Petchauer, 2012). Campus faculty, staff, and administrators should therefore support and look to empower Black students to cultivate their own hip-hop music oriented spaces; and should, furthermore, recognize the role of such spaces in fomenting community ties, engendering alternative modes of intellectual inclusion (Jenkins, 2011), and transforming historically white campuses.

As a movement that has its origins in African-diasporic cultural practices, hip hop and the spaces it occupies are inherently infused with Blackness. As such, hip-hop-oriented campus spaces have the power to disrupt existing notions of who gets to be a knowledge producer, as well as where and how knowledge gets produced (Jenkins, 2011). During the 1980s, when the administrations of PWIs were not attuned to and/or did not prioritize the delicate position of their Black students, students used music—brash, at times political, and at times socially-conscious hip-hop music—to both establish and announce their place on campus.

Today, inclusion and diversity concerns are among the most pressing facing institutions of higher education; yet creating a sense of belonging among Black students continues to be uniquely challenging. In this paper, I have argued that universities should use the 'college radio hip-hop era' example as a model for fostering and facilitating student-authored spaces where music plays a central role in creating community, developing social consciousness and a grounded sense of self, and, ultimately, in redefining historically white institutional spaces. Through understanding the importance of Black college-radio in facilitating student satisfaction, resilience, and community building during the 1980s and early 1990s, administrators, faculty, and staff at PWIs can appreciate and begin to rethink the role that Black-music-oriented spaces can play in addressing today's inclusion and diversity challenges.

References

- Acosta, O. (2015). *Stretch and Bobbito: Radio that changed lives*. DVD. Directed by B. Garcia. New York: Saboteur Media.
- Aitken, L. (1986). Racism on campus: Beyond The Citadel. *People*, 26 (24). Retrieved February 14, 2016, from <http://www.people.com/people/archive/article/0,,20095253,00.html>
- Allen, W. R. (1988). Black students in U.S. higher education: Toward improved access, adjustment, and achievement. *The Urban Review*, 20 (3), 165-188.
- Anderson, B. (1991). *Imagined communities: Reflections on the origin and spread of nationalism*. London: Verso Books.
- Arthur, C. E. (2015). Kool Aid, Frozen Pizza, and Academic Integrity: Learning from Mac Miller's Mixtape Missteps. *Internet Reference Services Quarterly*, 20(3-4), 127-134.
- Baker, C. N. (2013). Social support and success in higher education: The influence of on-campus support on African American and Latino college students. *The Urban Review*, 45 (5), 632-650.
- Ball, J. A. (2011). *I mix what I like!: A mixtape manifesto*. Oakland, CA: AK Press.
- Baraka, I. A. (1963). *Blues people: Negro music in white America*. New York: W. Morrow.
- Benson, B. (1997). [Liner Notes]. *The best of the Fat Boys: All meat no filler!* Los Angeles, CA; Rhino Entertainment Company.
- Berlant, L. (2008). *The female complaint: The unfinished business of sentimentality in American culture*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.

- Board, J. (2010). Multiculturalism in higher education-demographics and debates about inclusion: An aerial view of national diversity requirements. State University website. Retrieved February 14, 2016, from <http://education.stateuniversity.com/pages/2253/Multiculturalism-in-Higher-Education.html>
- Bonnette, L. M. (2015). *Pulse of the people: Political rap music and black politics*. University of Pennsylvania Press.
- Casselman, B. (2014, April 30). Race gap narrows in college enrollment, but not in graduation. *FiveThirtyEight*. Retrieved June 15, 2016, from <http://fivethirtyeight.com/features/race-gap-narrows-in-college-enrollment-but-not-in-graduation/>
- Curry, G. E. (1987, February 17). Racial climate turns cool on campuses. *Chicago Tribune*. Retrieved February 14, 2016, from http://articles.chicagotribune.com/1987-02-17/news/8701120903_1_racial-tension-black-sorority-incidents
- Davis, P. C. (1989). Law as microaggression. *The Yale Law Journal*, 98 (8), 1559-1577.
- DeNora, T. (2000). *Music in everyday life*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Essed, P. (1991). *Understanding everyday racism: An interdisciplinary theory*. Newbury Park, CA: Sage.
- Farrell, W. C., & Jones, C. K. (1988). Recent racial incidents in higher education: A preliminary perspective. *The Urban Review*, 20 (3), 211-226.
- Feagan, J. R., Vera, H., & Imani, N. (1996). *The agony of education: Black students at white colleges and universities*. New York: Routledge.
- Forman, M. (2002). *The 'hood comes first: Race, space, and place in rap and hip-hop*. Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press.
- Foster, P., & Marshall, W. (2015). Tales of the tape: Cassette culture, community radio, and the birth of rap music in Boston. *Creative Industries Journal*, 8 (2), 164-176.
- Frith, S. (1996). Music and identity. In S. Hall & P. du Gay (Eds.), *Questions of cultural identity* (pp. 108-127). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.
- George, N. (1998). *Hip hop America*. New York: Viking.
- Hall, P. A. (1997). African-American music: Dynamics of appropriation and innovation. In B. H. Ziff & P. V. Rao (Eds.), *Borrowed power: Essays on cultural appropriation* (pp. 31-51). New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press.
- Harrison, A. K. & Arthur, C. E. (2011). Reading *Billboard* 1979-1989: Exploring rap music's emergence through the music industry's most influential trade publication. *Popular Music and Society*, 34 (3), 309-327.

- Hill, J. H. (1998). Language, race, and white public space. *American Anthropologist*, 100 (3), 680-689.
- Hill, L.M. (2009). *Beats, rhymes, and classroom life: Hip-hop pedagogy and the politics of identity*. New York: Teacher's College Press.
- Horn, L., & Maw, C. (1995). Minority undergraduate participation in postsecondary education. *National Center For Education Statistics*. U.S. Department of Education: Office of Educational Research and Improvement (NCES 95-166).
- Humphreys, D. (2000, Fall). National survey finds diversity requirements common around the country. *Diversity Digest*. Retrieved February 14, 2016, from <http://www.diversityweb.org/Digest/F00/survey.html>
- Jackson, J. L. (2012). Recognition of student protestors during the 'Black Demands'. *Writing Our Story*. Retrieved June 15, 2016, from http://ohio5.openrepository.com/ohio5/bitstream/2374.DEN/3725/11/Jackson_Recog.pdf
- Jeffries, M.P. (2010). *Thug life: Race, gender, and the meaning of hip hop*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Jenkins, T. S. (2011). A beautiful mind: Black male intellectual identity and hip-hop culture. *Journal of Black Studies*, 42 (8), 1231-1251.
- Levine, S. (1987, March 10). Racial bias reemerges on campuses across the US. *Philly.com*. Retrieved February 14, 2016, from http://articles.philly.com/1987-03-10/news/26218979_1_racial-incidents-racial-slurs-student-financial-aid
- Lewis, K. S., & McKissic, S. C. (2010). Drawing sustenance at the source: African American students' participation in the Black campus community as an act of resistance. *Journal of Black Studies*, 41 (2), 264-280.
- Lowy, R. (1991). Yuppie racism: Race relations in the 1980s. *Journal of Black Studies*, 21 (4), 445-464.
- Marable, M. (1987, April 25). Racism on white campuses. *The Afro-American*, 5.
- Marable, M. (2000). Black studies and the racial mountain. *Souls: Critical Journal of Black Politics & Culture*, 2 (3), 17-36.
- McGill, A. (2015, November 23). The missing Black students at elite American universities. *The Atlantic*. Retrieved June 15, 2016, from <http://www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2015/11/black-college-student-body/417189/>
- Mitang, L. (1987, March 6). Bigotry is new, unwelcome trend on American campuses. *Schenectady Gazette*, 1.
- Newman, K. M. (2000). The forgotten fifteen million: Black radio, the "Negro market" and the Civil Rights Movement. *Radical History Review*, 76, 115-135.

- Page, H., & Thomas, B. R. (1994). White public space and the construction of white privilege in US health care: Fresh concepts and a new model of analysis. *Medical Anthropology Quarterly*, 8 (1), 109-116.
- Petchauer, E. (2012). *Hip-hop culture in college students' lives: Elements, embodiment, and higher edutainment*. New York: Routledge.
- Ramsey, G. P. (2003). *Race music: Black cultures from bebop to hip-hop*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.
- Rosen, J. (2009, October 12). The DORF matrix: Towards a theory of NPR's taste in Black music. *Slate.com*. Retrieved June 15, 2016, from http://www.slate.com/blogs/browbeat/2009/10/12/the_dorf_matrix_towards_a_theory_of_npr_s_taste_in_black_music.html
- Rubin, N. (2015). 'College radio': The development of a trope in US student broadcasting. *Interactions: Studies in Communication & Culture*, 6 (1), 47-64.
- Sauls, S. J. (2000). *The culture of American college radio*. Ames, IA: Iowa State Press.
- Shank, B. (2014). *The political force of musical beauty*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.
- Sue, D. W., Capodilupo, C. M., Torino, G. C., Bucceri, J. M., Holder, A., Nadal, K. L., & Esquilin, M. (2007). Racial microaggressions in everyday life: Implications for clinical practice. *American psychologist*, 62 (4), 271-286.
- Waits, J. C. (2008). Does 'indie' mean independence? Freedom and restraint in a late 1990s US college radio community. *Radio Journal: International Studies in Broadcast & Audio Media*, 5 (2-3), 83-96.
- Wall, T. (2007). Finding an alternative: Music programming in US college radio. *Radio Journal: International Studies in Broadcast & Audio Media*, 5 (1), 35-54.
- Wallace, D. (2008). Reinventing the wheel vs. grinding the same old axe: An ethnographic view of the students and community members at a Massachusetts college radio station. *Westminster Papers in Communication and Culture*, 5 (1), 44-66.
- Williams, L. (1986, December 15). Officials voice concern over racial incidents on U.S. campuses. *New York Times*, 13.

Notes:

¹ I want to thank Jessica James, Craig E. Arthur, Peter Z. Ribeiro, and everyone who attended the panel on “African Americans in Higher Education” at the 2016 National Council for Black Studies (NCBS) meetings for the motivation, insights, support, and opportunity to write this article.

² I hyphenate *college-radio* to indicate Black-oriented college-radio programming as distinct from radio programming at historically Black colleges and universities.

³ See, for example, Sauls (2000), Wall (2007), Waits (2008), Rubin (2015). A notable exception to this is Foster & Marshall (2015), which discusses the role of college radio in the emergence of Boston’s rap music scene.

⁴ While I recognize that for some insiders there are important distinctions between hip hop music and rap music, throughout this article I use the terms synonymously.

⁵ In his book *Hip Hop America* (1998), Nelson George lists fifteen popular raps songs that were released during this period (see pp. 80-82).

⁶ Foster & Marshall (2015) report that the first weekly hip hop show in Boston—Lecco’s Lemma— appeared in 1985 on MIT’s WMBR 88.1 FM. In the fall of 1986, the show moved to Boston College’s WZBC 90.3 FM (p. 169).

⁷ Here I am thinking about schools like the University of Massachusetts at Amherst, the University of Oklahoma in Norman, Penn State University in State College (Pennsylvania), Michigan State University in East Lansing, and Virginia Tech in Blacksburg.

⁸ For faculty and staff, this minimal contact is connected to their residence in nearly all-white college towns.

⁹ See, for example, Williams (1986), Marable (1987), Allen (1988), and Farrell & Jones (1988).

¹⁰ And a 1988 report documented “racial incidents on 130 college campuses since the 1986-87 school year” (Farrell & Jones, 1988, p. 214).

¹¹ In the aftermath, Black Mt. Holyoke College students reported being harassed and shoved by white men in the UMass library; and, at Smith College, “Niggers, chinks and spics stop your complaining” and “Niggers go home” were founded written on the steps of the Multicultural Center (Curry, 1987)—both Mt Holyoke and Smith College are part of the Five College Consortium along with UMass.

¹² Which was first introduced by psychiatrist Chester Pierce in the 1970s.

¹³ I grew up in Western Massachusetts and attended UMass from 1988 to 1992.

¹⁴ These are distinct from officially sponsored announcements in that they occur within the context of ordinary DJ talk.

¹⁵ In researching this project, one of the first cassettes I listened to featured an announcement regarding an upcoming meeting to draft the Constitution for the Black Student Union at the University of Massachusetts (Amherst).

¹⁶ In their discussion of off-campus environmental racism, Farrell and Jones notably list “not playing minority-oriented music” (1988, p. 218) as an example of a factor contributing to Black students’ sense of not-belonging.

¹⁷ Having grown up in Western Massachusetts, I regularly crossed paths with non-UMass affiliated friends who spoke pride-fully about hearing a DJ *shout me out* on the radio.

¹⁸ I credit this connection between intimate publics and music listening experiences to Barry Shank (2014).

¹⁹ For a discussion of how hip hop in general helps to forge such alliances in a twenty-first century context, see Petchauer (2012).

²⁰ I have found that this is especially true for college radio stations at the types of large state schools discussed in this article. Through discussions with colleagues, I have learned that some smaller schools have greater institutional surveillance over such things as play lists and what is discussed on the air.