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ENSLAVEMENT, SOCIETY, AND CULTURE: INTERPRETING THE EVOLUTION OF AFRICAN- AMERICAN MUSIC

Abstract

African American music represents a glorious chapter in American culture and is profoundly linked with African American social history. The music styles like spirituals, Ragtime, blues, Gospels, and Hip-hop form part of the unique cultural products of the nation. The life of African Americans has gone through various momentous events like Enslavement, racism, emancipation, civil rights movements, and the recent Black Lives Matter movement. The history of music is also the history of the musicians and social, political, and cultural movements closely linked to people's lives. The paper briefly explores and elucidates the critical milestones in the evolution of African American music from the early periods of Enslavement to recent times.

Keywords: *African American music, Enslavement, Atlantic slave trade, Emancipation, Civil Rights Movement, Black Lives Matter movement.*

Introduction

In the five hundred years between 1400 to 1900, Africa witnessed four enslaved person trades—the Trans-Saharan slave trade (enslaved people taken from the South of Sahara to northern Africa), the Red Sea slave trade (enslaved people taken from the inland of Red Sea to the middle east and India), the Indian Ocean Slave trade (enslaved people taken from Eastern Africa to the Middle East or India) and the Trans- Atlantic slave trade. Considered as the most extensive and elaborate maritime and commercial venture, the Trans-Atlantic slave trade took enslaved people from West Africa, East Central Africa, and Eastern Africa to the European colonies in the Americas (Nathan Nunn, 2008). The slave trade is always remembered for its barbarism, unspeakable and inhuman treatment, and total deprivation of around twelve million African people. It is a fact that it remained a neglected area of study and research mainly due to its deep connection with Western imperialism and a lack of proper methodology to analyze highly complex and mostly vague quantitative data. However, the sweeping political, economic, and intellectual changes that

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hit the European and North American societies and, most notably, the rise of independent African countries triggered a sudden surge of interest in this field of study. During the first world war, scholars started to critically assess the fundamental assumptions of imperialism, and post second world war saw a new direction and approach given to studying the Atlantic Slave Trade. (Herbert S Klein 2010). The study uses historical analysis to trace the movement of African musical culture from the shores of Africa to America. African - American music, or Black music, has roughly evolved through the periods of Enslavement, which saw the birth of negro spirituals, the Great Migration (1916-30), the civil rights movement (1945-1968), and the more recent Black Lives Matter campaign (2012 onwards). The paper is divided into three parts. The first part briefly deals with the Atlantic slave trade, the second part examines the stages of development of African American music in the pre-modern era, and the last section deals with the modern age, which saw the establishment of African-American music in the cultural base of America.

Music is an essential constituent of every culture representing its fundamental values and qualities and is linked with other components of culture like economics, polity, religion folk, and festivals. The traditional African society had a religious and aesthetic structure that was vibrant and elegant influenced by social and formal structures. It was on this foundation that African-American music emerged. The theoretical basis of the emergence of African-American music can be analyzed under theoretical formulations like survivalism, syncretism, and non-survivalism. The dominant theme till the 1930s considered African music a degraded form of original European music. This view was set aside mainly by anthropologist Melville Herskovits, the founder of scientific Afro-American studies. and his works. He gave theoretical support to the idea that African culture survived and thrived in America (Simpson 1973:1). The theory of survivalism by Herskovitz provides the idea with that preparation and adaption to the different life challenges apply to African cultures surviving the transatlantic trade and slavery. There was a live cultural transplant from Africa to America. Apart from adaptation, the other features of survivalism include resilience and the significance of community and networking. Another theoretical exposition worth mentioning is the theory of syncretism or reinterpretation by Richard Waterman, which emphasizes merging different cultures to create a new form. It envisages flexibility and malleability in the cultural realm. Ultimately, the merging of cultures or the superimposition of one culture on the other leads to the birth of new artistic forms like African-American music and identities. Jackson's theory of non-survivalism is less popular and discussed, which is simply the opposite of survivalism. It puts forward the dependence on external agencies and individual resilience rather than community support and networking (Jackson, George Pullen 1932,1933). Another approach, also known as the compromise theory, specifically dealing with African-American music's evolution was propounded by the Austrian musicologist, Hornbostel. He elaborated on the aspects of cultural continuity

that ensured the survival and adaption of African music. He also interestingly dealt with the classification of musical instruments used in African-American music highlighting the blending of African and European culture. He also pointed out that the rhythmic form in African-American music originates in the polyrhythms and syncopation of African music. He argued that African and African-American pieces of music were rhythmically, melodically, and harmonically distinct, sharing only a common “way” of singing (Hornbostel E, M. Von 1926:748-753). In the context of the development of African-American music, the theory of survivalism and syncretism seems to provide an analytical and theoretical foundation for a good understanding of the growth of African American music in the background of the slave trade and enslavement. It is to be understood that African music was never wholly transferred to America. Northern Africa was ahead of other countries in mathematics, science, and shipping. Music, musical instruments, and dance also showed significant development. Musical styles like heterophonic, in which a melodic line and its different forms are played simultaneously, and the more popular call and response style, in which the main singer calls out words and a group of singers repeats them are examples. Polyrhythm used by drummers formed the foundation of African American music (Burten W Peretti 2009:8). Mellonee V Burmin has identified three essential aspects of black music, firstly, sound quality, which can be seen in call and response with different vocal and instrumental elements; secondly, the type of delivery surrounding body movement, dress, and presentation style and, finally, mechanics, which includes improvisation involving personal interpretation (Mellonee V Burmin,1985).

Philip Curtin, in his work ‘The Atlantic Slave Trade: A Census’, gives the total number of the slave trade to Europe, the Atlantic, and America from 1440 to 1860. He estimated that around 9.5 million people moved in the Atlantic slave trade of which 175000 went to Europe and islands off the African coast. (Philip D Curtin 1969). It was followed by a set of studies that looked into complex and intense issues related to the economic, social, cultural, and political dimensions of the slave trade. The cultural dimension is one of the significant areas of analysis and research. Interestingly, the nearly three hundred and fifty years of the Trans-Atlantic slave trade also tell the story of the blossoming of a rich culture that grew and flourished amid this and European colonialism. Atlantic slave trade and African- American music are closely related. It transferred African music and its values to the American shore. Musical styles like spirituals, Ragtime, the blues, Jazz, rhythm and blues, gospel, and hip-hop are the treasured cultural products of the country. The instruments used in this music, like banjo and drums, and the forms of music, like call and response and the immersive approach to singing where an entire song is presented to the student repeatedly, have close connections with African music. All these developed and flourished amid harsh racial discrimination, crushing poverty, and other numerous challenges, showcasing the community’s resilience and creativity. Music is an essential component of culture and is

closely related to the other ingredients of culture, like economics, politics, religion, arts, folk, and ceremonies. The rich treasure of music from the slave trade can be found in the four continents of Europe, the Americas, the Caribbean, and Africa (Brown D 2016). Thus, African-American music is profoundly involved in American social, economic, and political history. Africa, often described as the primitive 'dark continent,' was home to the first human settlements with a diverse cultural and social life. People migrated in response to changes in climate, food availability, and trade and commerce.

Enslavement

The period from 1790 to 1860 is considered the high point of the slave trade in America. Between 1650 and 1860, approximately ten to fifteen million enslaved people were taken from Western Africa to the Americas. In their book 'The American Slave Coast: A History of the Slave Breeding Industry,' Ned and Constance Sublette view slavery not as unpaid labor but as the treating of people as property, traded goods, collateral, and capital. Of the over twelve million enslaved people transported to the Americas, only around four to five lakhs made it to the USA. Sublette notes that apart from producing cotton, sugar, tobacco, and rice, they enslaved people or slave breeding, so much so that Thomas Jefferson estimated an annual increase of four percent in Virginia's capital by the birth of black children. In 1860, enslaved Americans were worth four billion dollars, more significant than two hundred and twenty-eight million dollars' worth of gold and silver, and values of southern farmland worth 1.92 billion dollars. So, for the enslavers, it was everything (Ned & Constance Sublette, 2015). Historian Edward Baptist, in his work 'The Half, Has Never Been Told: Slavery and the Making of American Capitalism,' categorically states that slavery was the cornerstone upon which the United States was transformed into a modern, industrial capitalist economy. Enslavement could change a person into cash in no time. He argues that enslaved people helped the USA to produce around two billion pounds of cotton, an essential component in the Industrial Revolution, a year to become a global superpower (2014:3). Isabel Wilkerson, in her work 'Caste: The Lies That Divides Us,' considers the institution of slavery as the conversion of human beings into currency, into machines to aid the profitmaking of their owners. She sees slavery as an American innovation created just for the benefit of the dominant race (Isabel Wilkerson, 2020).

The European powers' Enslavement and colonization of western Africa started around 1400. The Portuguese traders brought around twelve thousand people as part of trade between 1475 to 1540 (Ray A Key, 1982). The demand for enslaved people was limited in Europe. So, they sent these people to their colony Brazil, and used the enslaved people to transform Brazil into a significant sugar-producing settlement. The rising demand for enslaved people from America was felt for the first time on the African coast in the second half of the

sixteenth century (Philip D Curtin 1969). David Eltis estimates that around seven hundred thousand Africans were taken to America between 1580 to 1640 (2000:9). The place of origin was a determining factor of value and demand, and Africans from the Gold Coast were the most preferred, while the Biafrans were the least preferred. By the seventeenth century, stiff competition emerged for the Portuguese from the Dutch, French, and English.

The enslavement process was perfected by systematically transforming individuals into human commodities and later into machines that would plant and harvest sugar, rice, and tobacco crops. Violence played a major role in this process. It was used scientifically to test the limits of someone's capacity to suffer or the limits up to which it is possible to discipline the body without taking out the life. The physical and psychological trauma of the violence endured during Enslavement and the travel in the slave ship made many of the captives not good enough for work. The physical condition of the people was terrible, and the agents had them washed, shaved, and applied oil to their bodies to make them look healthy (Stephanie E Smallwood, 2007). Orlando Patterson described slavery as a social death (Orlando Patterson, 1982).

People had to begin their lives from the start and create a culture and music that suited the local environment. Whatever memories and practices they had, slowly diminished, mainly due to the mixing of different cultures of African groups and the influence of the powerful new surroundings they were put into. One of the positive outcomes was the emergence of new blended music styles, like Brazilian Folk music originating with mixing African and American cultures. Music was the essential feature of community life in North Africa, where most enslaved people came. Historian R.F Thompson has pointed out five essential features of North African dance and music, which include firstly, the importance of rhythm as missionary musicologist A.M Jones notes, 'Rhythm is to the African, what harmony is to the European' (Jones A M 1959). The second feature was the use of multiple meters which play different rhythms simultaneously. The third one was the distinct and separate contributions of musicians and dancers in performance. The next one was the style of call and response in singing, led by a leader and followed by a chorus. The final one was the clever use of songs and dance to express and release their rising tension, disappointments, and frustrations of Enslavement (Robert Farris Thompson 1984).

Spirituals and Black Face Minstrelsy

The spirituals were a musical form that evolved from slave work songs. It is said to have originated about a century before the abolition of slavery and reached its full glory between 1830 and 1865 (Johnson, James Weldon, and Johnson J Rosamond 1937). Slave work songs that lament and protest reflected the life filled with hard work and great difficulty on the plantations. Slave spirituals are often recognized as the initial forms of African-American music.

The spirituals became the base on which musical forms like the blues, gospel, Jazz, and the protest songs of the 1960s later evolved. Spirituals developed out of the pain and misery of thousands of people who were forcibly transported to a foreign land and stripped of their identity to become enslaved. Slave work involved long hours of agonizing and humiliating work. Singing songs was a way to pass the time, relieve the boredom of a tough job, and increase strength and endurance. Slowly, work songs and spirituals also evolved to communicate with one another. Work songs formed a prominent part of forced labor and musical culture, especially in southern America. Enslaved people worked in plantations, factories, and ports. Work songs mainly came from plantations.

The owners found silent workers dangerous and feared conspiracy. So, for them, singing songs during work will eliminate dangerous thoughts and improve productivity. For sociologist and historian W.E.B Du Bois, spirituals were 'sorrow songs' reflecting the intense sorrow of the enslaved community. He commented on the ability of Africans to transform trouble into songs (1903:250-264). The enslaved people were made to attend church mainly to hear carefully modified Christian teachings to justify slavery. During the Sunday service, they sang hymns, and later on, their personal life and fate slowly started getting reflected in their songs. They stayed back after service to participate in singing songs that took the common theme of repentance and deliverance and incorporated them into a genre that would become the most significant influence on American music. Most spirituals expressed hope for redemption in the life after and were sometimes profoundly personal. Although most enslaved people embraced Christianity, they did not form part of the official church. The important development that shaped African-American music was the establishment of the black autonomous churches. Racism by the white-controlled churches gave birth to the African Methodist Episcopal and African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church. These churches emphasized freedom in the present life rather than heavenly freedom. Reverend Richard Allen, who essentially created AME, published a volume of Methodist hymns in 1801 (Milton C Sernett 1997).

There was a style of 'moaning' in singing that came out of the melismatic singing of Africa and the Caribbean. Frederick Douglas says, "The songs of slaves represented their sorrows rather than their joy like tears were a relief to aching hearts" (2005:12). They also created their spirituals which contained coded messages about hope and escape plans. The spirituals took themes from the Old Testament, like the exodus, which narrated the story of Moses, who, by Divine inspiration led Israel's people out of Egypt to the promised land of Canaan. They drew themes heavily from the Old Testament and, to a small extent, from the New Testament, especially the sufferings, crucifixion, and death of Jesus Christ, with less emphasis on the birth of Christ (Yolanda Y Smith 2010). There was a promise in the spirituals that freedom and justice could be attained here itself. Songs like

“No more driver’s lash for me
No more pint o’ salt for me
No more hundred lash for me
No more mistress’ call for me” are good examples.

Dr. James Norris, in a documentary titled “Slave Songbook: Origin of the Negro Spirituals,” narrates that these songs were everything for the enslaved people. They had to sing about their condition of being sold and getting separated from their family. They had to sing to keep their flame burning and intense. The songs had twin effects of diverging from the strenuous work and forming the base of African-American music. The spirituals strengthened the enslaved community to sustain itself. It acted as a means of education and worship and helped resolve their march toward freedom and social change (Yolanda Y Smith 2010). John Lovel identifies the enslaved people’s obsession with freedom, their desire for justice, and their tactic for battle as the three significant social implications of spirituals (Lovel John, 1939).

Blackface was first introduced in the late 1830s as minstrel shows and later became America’s most popular form of entertainment. It began as a musical comedy program in which white performers painted their faces and visible body parts black by applying burnt cork and grease paint to look like black people. It used white performers’ offensive replicas of African American speech, music, and dance (Cole, Catherine M, and Tracy C Davis, 2013:7-12). Minstrels involve singing, dancing, and skits, with the master of ceremonies leading, followed by a group of minstrels. William Henry Lane, popularly known as Master Juba, the solitary African American minstrel dancing talent became a sensation before the Civil War. Charles Dickens, in his ‘Notes on America,’ wrote about the ‘lively young negro’ as ‘the greatest dancer known’ (1850:100). He is considered the pioneer of modern tap dancing, combining Irish and black patterns. The huge success and acceptability of Master Juba, even by the white people, was a big incentive for the later African American musicians despite the explicit racism. (Burten W Peretti 2009). Before the Civil War, the minstrels were famous in the northern cities. Later, they moved Southwards. Minstrel groups gained popularity as the Civil War drew to a close. Georgia Minstrels, started in Macon, Georgia, in 1865, had fifteen of his former captives as troupe members, and of all the minstrels, Callender’s Georgia Minstrels became the most successful. Although the post-war minstrels continued to have the customary racial component, they successfully portrayed the fast-changing social conditions in America, primarily through the skits that showed the dangerous and treacherous city life compared with the peace and tranquility that prevailed in the rural South.

Post-civil war America saw rapid industrialization, immigration, racial violence, and class tensions. Urbanization saw the development of new

institutions and ideas and the arrival of people from Eastern and Southern Europe, especially into the northern states. New forms of worship, language, politics, and food habits came with them. New leisure and sporting institutions like saloons, dance floors, boxing, and baseball developed. A new consumer class emerged with the arrival of departmental stores and amusement parks. The outlook of women, especially young women, changed with the introduction of bicycles and telephones, giving them new ideas and avenues of recreation and mobility. These women came out of the shadows of their mothers, joined college, and participated in sports, music, and dance. The presence of African American members in the minstrels coincided with the development of commercial popular music. The decade between 1860 and 1870 saw the secularization of popular music with a steep decline in religious passion and interest and a decrease in the number of church-goers among black males. The decade between 1890 and 1900 witnessed some significant developments as artists emerged from the minstrel tag and created their performances. The invention of the phonograph and the emergence of new styles like cakewalk and Ragtime gave African Americans a prominent place in popular music. The wax cylinders of Thomas Edison and shellac disks of Emile Berliner made recordings possible for three minutes. The period also saw the legal sanction for segregation as the US Supreme ruled 'separate but equal.' The African American musicians were targeted and attacked violently, like the killing of jazz clarinetist Big Eye Louis Nelson in New Orleans by a mob of white racists. By 1880, Minstrel shows were replaced by Vaudeville which dealt with racial tensions but was moderate. It consisted of jokes, coon-songs, juggling, songs for entertainment, and dance.

Ragtime and Blues

Ragtime became prominent in 1890 and remained in mainstream music until 1920 before giving way to Jazz. John Edward Hasse defines Ragtime as a dance-based vernacular American music featuring a syncopated melody against an even accompaniment. It drew the nation's attention for almost two decades while representing America at the beginning of the twentieth century. The period of Ragtime saw the widening of life opportunities for black people as they moved out of the South. As a generation born after emancipation, they wished to put the difficulties endured during the period of Enslavement behind them and decided to move on in life. American society saw significant changes like rapid urbanization, immigration, and the development of a vast transportation network (John Edward Hasse 1985). An unlikely star of this period was the piano occupying the central position in the field of music. It became a central component in middle-class families and white families. It attained status symbol and dignity.

The African American middle class who mastered the piano and wished to use their talents by performing at concert halls soon discovered the enormous

challenge of racial discrimination and had to satisfy themselves by performing at pubs or taverns, stage, and touring shows. 'Louisiana Rag,' composed by Theodore Northup, is considered the first piano composition using Ragtime. The real hero of the rag was Tom Turpin, whose composition 'Harlem Rag' is considered a masterpiece in the piano rag. One influential African American ragtime musician, Scott Joplin, joined with music publisher John S Stark to produce the hugely popular 'Maple Leaf Rag' in 1899 (Conklin, Michael 2014). The ragtime era also saw rising assertiveness and protests against racial injustices. Ragtime presented a group of impressive and dignified African American musicians whom everyone, irrespective of race, liked. Middle-class whites, college students, and wealthy middle-aged whites became big fans of Ragtime. One of the essential significances of Ragtime was that it allowed African musicians to enter commercial music in an era of rampant racism. Rags were played in restaurants, carnivals, dance halls, and unique restaurants where dances like cabaret brought close contact between all races and genders and revolutionized the nightlife in urban areas. The Great Migration was another big event that transformed America's social and cultural life. Southern migrants transformed religion, culture, and, more significantly, music. Blues, Jazz, Gospel, Hill Billy, and country music spread during this period (James N Gregory 2005).

Although the origin of Blues could be more precise, historians typically connect it with the plantations in the Mississippi Delta and Atlantic tidewater regions and with the travel singers or the songsters who used to visit the plantations. David Evans notes that blue songs emerged in the deep South's rural, urban, and suburban areas, especially New Orleans and Memphis (Evans, David 1987). Blues music was the product of African and European influence during slavery. The critical European influences are found in the Instruments used, like the Acoustic Guitar, modified harmonic sequences, strophic form, which deals with the repetition of lines, and most importantly, Rhymes introduced to America through European music and poems. The notable African influences are the call and response, the pentatonic scale, the slide taken from the sliding technique of the diddley bow, an African tradition, and the form of singing. The earlier blues were known as the Delta Blues. The blues portray the transformation of an enslaved African into an African American citizen. It developed as a personalized style of musical expression with underlying themes of leisure and personal perspectives of life experience (Alan Lomax, 1993). Scholars describe blues as an artistic creation portraying difficulties of poverty and racial tensions. It is also described as the voice of the enslaved people who struggled to find an identity in the middle of freedom, the industrial revolution, and, more importantly, Jim Crow segregation. The Africans during this time had more time for leisure, reflect on their life and learn playing instruments like the Guitar, piano, and banjo. In its initial stage, blues lacked a decisive structure and form and evolved. Blues Famous early blue artists include Bessie Smith, Ma Rainey, Robert Johnson, Bunk Johnson, B B King, John Hurt, Skip

James, and Muddy Waters. Blues did not find much favor from the devout church-going Christians, as they criticized blues as dirty, perverted, and vulgar and even called it the music of the devil. The provocation seems to be the honest representation of sexuality, love, and relationships by the blues. A good example is the famous song by Bessie Smith, 'Need a Little Sugar in my Bowl.' The Great Migration has also been reflected in Blues music as freedom and the need for work made people, including women, especially singers, travel.

Jazz and the Gospels

A fresh musical direction appeared in America at the beginning of the twentieth century. The word Jazz became popular by 1913, but this music, famed for its loudness, audacity, and riot, was active in New Orleans at least ten years earlier. Jazz developed during the World Wars when the USA became a world power. Jazz also helped the black community achieve respectability and prosperity in society. It possessed a unique pulsating vigor and was daring and random. A song would be performed in different ways, making it appealing. Jazz arose as a fusion of several musical cultures of different peoples: African Rhythm and European harmony and instrumentation like piano, clarinet, saxophone, and Guitar. (Garry Giddins & Scott DeVeaux, 2015). The need to consolidate the new world's inhabitants unified many different traditions into one culture. The mixing process resulted in first the appearance of Ragtime, blues, and proto-jazz and then Jazz in the conventional sense.

Jazz is rousing rhythms and pleasing live music always evolving and moving. Considering its social structure, Jazz is presented to a participatory audience, like the call-and-response type. With this direction, perhaps no other form of music can be compared or even confused with any other genre. The inventiveness, as well as the passion that jazz compositions are filled with, has no boundaries. It is easy to hear and recognize this extraordinary music that expresses human feelings from boundless joy to uncontrollable anger. It elegantly blended the vitals of musical styles that existed in America then. Jazz took syncopation from Ragtime, sensuality, and tonality from Blues and has emotional depths, spirituality, and desire. This blend produced a remarkable result that perfectly accompanies the twentieth century's dynamics and hectic American life. The music always involves dances that are quick tapping and slapping (Collier, James Lincoln, 1978). New Orleans Jazz is considered traditional. The term describes the style of musicians who played Jazz in New Orleans from 1900 to 1917 and those musicians who played and recorded in Chicago from 1917 to the 1920s. Initially, the first jazz bands to perform in New Orleans restaurants, small groups of black musicians began touring different cities for better pay. Thus 1917 marked the beginning of a new stage in the development of Jazz but this time in Chicago. It is well known that the birth of Jazz as a musical movement took place in the USA in the late 19th century (Ted Gioia, 1997).

By the turn of the century, Spirituals slowly gave way to the development of the gospel. Most churches started to prefer the European singing style in unison rather than the excited heterophony of church choirs to refine their parishioners. Chicago became the epicenter of gospel music. As African Americans migrated to the northern cities, they carried their form of worship and music with them. Interestingly the Lincoln Memorial Programme on August 28, 1963, is considered a watershed moment in the annals of African American music. The meeting had the best talents in African American music, including Mahalia Jackson. Of all the styles that preceded, gospels contained the essential ingredients of the civil rights movements, like fellowship, the essence of concern, and the drive towards integrity and change. It also significantly influenced African Americans' secular music life and culture during the Great Depression and the years after the Second World War. The rise of the Pentecostal church also played a role in developing gospels. Thomas A Dorsey, widely regarded as the father of Gospel music, used the music of spirituals, traditional worship, blues, Jazz, and Swing to develop Gospel music. He facilitated the transition of the African American Church and forged a relationship between the divine and secular music that was emerging in the African American culture. Gifted with organization and business skills, he made gospels a commercial success and played a significant role in promoting the career of Mahalia Jackson. There was a clear division in the attires and styles of singing between male and female gospel singers.

Rhythm &Blue, Rock N Roll, and Freedom Singers.

The Gospels' massive success and the electric Guitar's popularity paved the way for the emergence of new styles of music like Rhythm and Blue and Rock 'N' Roll. All these styles were non-religious and showed the new affluent kind of life. Jazz and Blues remained prevalent throughout the 1930s and 1940s. Sometimes during the 1940s, Blues, and Country Rock blended to give birth to Rock N Roll. Artists like Ray Charles, Big Mama Thornton, and Fats Domino pioneered this movement and succeeded despite record labels and radio stations reluctant to play back artists. Rock N Roll relates to exciting talents like Chuck Berry, Little Richard, and Buddy Holly. It was considered a music anyone could play and dance to. The popularity of Rock N Roll was further boosted by Sam Philipps and his Sun Record, which launched the musical genius, Elvis Presley (Louis Menand, 2015). The civil rights movement used music to further harmony, courage, and group feelings. These songs provided the moral foundation for the freedom struggle and helped express and sustain the movement. Martin Luther King Jr and the SLCC (Southern Christian Leadership Conference) promoted freedom songs as an essential element to enthuse his followers. The SNCC (Student Nonviolent Coordination Committee) also used music for the same purpose. The song 'We Shall Overcome' owes its origin to the black worker Lucille Simmonds 'We Will Overcome' is an excellent example of music's importance in the civil rights

movement (Raymond Arsenault, 2009).

Into the Modern Era.

The decade between 1970 and 1980 saw the rapid rise of the African American middle class, and it also witnessed a reverse migration towards the South. The community also became politically active, with the mayors of Atlanta, Los Angeles, and Cleveland being African American. Modern African American music was dominated by a phenomenon called Michael Jackson. His album 'Thriller' released in 1982, is considered the biggest commercially successful record album ever released. His style was a mix of Funk, disco, salsa, glam rock, and glittering costumes, along with the peculiar personality of Michael Jackson himself (Nelson George, 1984). The success of a few musicians created a wealthy class, although most blacks still lived in poverty and the shadows of rampant inequality. The prosperity of the black community depended greatly on the success of the music business in the post second world war. Businessmen started showing interest in popular music, and recording companies like Chess, Specialty, Sun, Atlantic, and King helped flourish black performers, especially new ones. Another style of music that burst into the scene in the 60s was Funk, which originated in West Africa. It is seen as the abridgment and elaboration of Soul music. James Brown and his high-energy performances, elegant hairstyles, and clothing proved a big sensation and success. Considered to have evolved through jazz improvisation, Funk gave Black American music a new spectrum, mixing high and low-note rhythms. The other prominent stars include Sly and the Family Stone, Kool and the Gang, and Stevie Wonder (Rickey Vincent, 1996). One significant cultural and societal impact of funk music was the intense feeling of African American urban separatism, which rejected the integration of the communities. The white community was not sympathetic as they had reservations about black separatism. The 1980s saw the rise of Disco, which had its European origin but still played an essential role in shaping African American music. Disco's popularity was short-lived as whites regarded it as the music of bold African Americans. Bruce J Schulman believes that the movement against Disco was an organized white backlash against black social unification and also against gay rights. It is also a fact that the decline of Disco can be attributed to the rapid rise of new musical styles promoted by recording studios (Bruce J Schulman 2001).

With the decline of Disco, another style that took the field of music by storm was Hip Hop and Rap which came to prominence during the 1970s. The African American and Caribbean-American youth of New York and especially the socially and economically backward region of Bronx molded Hip Hop. It is said that hip-hop popped out from the house parties in the Bronx, and soon, it became a sort of underground cultural movement only for domestic distribution. The main features included visual art or graffiti, dance like Breakdance, and

Freak, a vigorous couple dance. With its popularity on the upswing, the music spread to the radio. It soon became a rage among millions of young Americans who used it to express their identity and politics, creating a lively multicultural community nationwide. Rap was a strong statement of the new urban black youth culture. It challenged the middle class's behavioral, social, and aesthetic norms. The lack of a good quality of life proved to be a stumbling block for the young generation to get a good musical education, and they, with the aid of technology, started deriving their styles of music. The intense stress on tuneless, highly rhythmic speech distinguished Rap from other styles (Nelson George, 2005). The leading proponents include Kool Herc (Clive Campbell), Grand Master Flash (Joseph Saddler), and Afrika Bambaataa (Kevin Donovan). The early famous and commercially successful tracks include *Rapper's Delight* and *The Message*, in which *The Message* established social realism, a new trend in Rap music that portrayed the South Bronx's sad situation. Gangsta Rap, another Rap style that narrated the issues faced by urban communities, became controversial as it was criticized for favoring hostility and violence, insulting women, and misogyny. Music and culture of Hip Hop have lately shown great diversity and have now found their place in American popular culture.

Music was vital for 'The Black Lives Matter' protest movement, which peaked in 2020, and aimed to make the rulers or oppressors socially uncomfortable, thereby bringing social change (Iorio, D. 2017). Some examples are songs like 'All Right' by Kendrick Lamar, 'Chains' by Usher, 'Don't Shoot' by Games, and 'Be Free' by J Cole. Contrary to the earlier protest movements, the Black Lives Matter movement happened when there was a great awareness of state violence and injustice. Daphne A Brooks views that the protest music portrays new social issues like the prison-industrial complex, globalized wealth inequality, and the violent expenditure of women and children (Daphne A Brooks 2016). 'Freedom' by Beyonce examines slavery and its effect on the present generation apart from representing police barbarity (Phelps-Ward, R., Allen, C., & Howard, J. L. 2018). In her 'Americans,' Janelle Monae uses sarcasm and pointed phrases to focus on topics like racism, homophobia, sexism, classism, nationalism, police brutality, and immigration. Another song that kept the movement alive was the single 'Alright' from the album 'To Pimp a Butterfly' by Kendrick Lamar. The chorus 'We Gonna be Alright' was sung enthusiastically, portraying the protest against police brutality (Torrey, Jessica 2021).

Conclusion

African American music gives voice to the significant ideas of the life of African Americans. While, Enslavement, exclusion, and civil rights rulings are seen within the context of the interracial relationship, African American music clearly shows the mixing of African, European, and American cultures. It represents the marriage and continuous interaction between African and

non-African cultures. Back in the 1800s, while Black face minstrelsy openly showed racism and white domination, African American musicians took center stage in the American cultural scene by the twentieth century. Musicians like Scott Joplin, Louis Armstrong, Michael Jackson, and the latest singers used music to gain recognition and visibility in American society. It is interesting to see that the different styles of music that emerged at various times had a close connection with the social and political situation that prevailed at those times. Music was the medium through which African Americans conveyed their protest and brought change. Although there are criticisms that much of the African identity is sacrificed for commercial success, the history and evolution of African American Music shows that despite mixing cultures, African music's cultural identity is preserved and cherished.

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