

Rock and Racism

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- I. Understanding racism
 - a. Racism is often misunderstood
 - i. Race prejudice is not the same as racism; race prejudice can exist across several races
 - ii. Racism = racial prejudice + systemic abuse of power
 - b. Contextual timeline
 - i. 1440s – European slave trade starts in Africa
 - ii. 1600s – Europeans begin settling in North America, often bringing their slaves with them
 - iii. 1807 – British Parliament votes to abolish the slave trade
 - iv. 1862 – Lincoln’s Emancipation Proclamation
 - v. 1865 – U.S. Congress abolishes slavery through the 13th Amendment
 - vi. 1896 – *Plessy v. Ferguson* establishes a “separate but equal” standard
 - vii. 1954 – *Brown vs. the Board of Education* strikes down *Plessy*, effectively dismantling the legal argument for “separate but equal”
 - viii. 1964 – Congress passes the Civil Rights Act
 - ix. 1965 – Malcolm X assassinated
 - x. 1968 – Martin Luther King, Jr. assassinated
- II. Understanding art
 - a. We represent who we are through art; it is informed by culture and represents culture.
 - b. Art is about identity.
 - c. Art doesn’t always serve the exact same purpose; it is what we need it to be at a certain time. For example, art can grow out of a need for protest, for beauty, for expression, etc.
- III. Very brief overview of rock history
 - a. Origins
 - i. Music
 - ii. Jazz and gospel (African-inspired church music) evolve into the blues, then rhythm & blues (R&B) and rockabilly (adds country), and then rock ‘n’ roll
 - iii. **Play “Cross Road Blues”** by Robert Johnson, 1936/37, and **“Crossroads”** by Cream (featuring Eric Clapton), 1968
- IV. Major identity developments in African-American music culture
 - a. From the rural south to the urban north
 - i. Context: mass migration north by African-Americans. From 1940 to 1944, 50,000 African-Americans from Mississippi alone moved to Chicago. The urban environment influences the sound of southern blues and it becomes electrified.
 - ii. Artists of note: Muddy Waters, Howlin’ Wolf, B.B. King, Ike Turner, Little Richard, Chuck Berry
 - iii. **Play “Screamin’ and Cryin’”** by Muddy Waters, 1949

iv. Racism

1. Fear of black culture: “the basic, heavy-beat music of the Negroes [appeals to] the base in man, brings out animalism and vulgarity ... [it represents a] plot to mongrelize America.”
-Ace Carter, White Citizens Council of Birmingham
2. Music industry: “[Rock ‘n’ Roll is] the most brutal, ugly, desperate, vicious form of expression it has been my misfortune to hear.”
-Frank Sinatra, testifying before Congress in 1958
 - a. Large record labels sought to protect their economic interests
 - b. American Society of Composers, Authors and Publishers (ASCAP) refused to license rock ‘n’ roll because it wanted to protect the interests of its “professional” songwriters.
 - c. Sanitizing: many companies hired white musicians to cover black songs to make them more palatable to white audiences.
 - i. **Play “Tutti Frutti”** by Little Richard and Pat Boone, 1955
 - ii. “Pretty little Susie is the girl for me” instead of “Boys you don’t know what she do to me”
 - d. African-Americans wrote songs and were then ripped off by white artists, who received fame and profit. (Arthur “Big Boy” Crudup)

v. Elvis

1. Combined gospel, blues and country music.
2. First recording session: “That’s All Right, Mama” by Crudup and “Blue Moon of Kentucky” by Bill Monroe
3. **Play “That’s All Right”** – Elvis Presley

b. Motown and Soul in the 60s

- i. Context: race riots in the late 60s across the United States as African-Americans struggle with lack of civil rights progress.
- ii. Berry Gordy started Motown in Detroit in 1959
 1. Gordy believed in Martin Luther King’s integrationist program. Motown released several of King’s speeches, including the “I Have a Dream” speech.
 2. Mickey Stevenson, producer: “Berry felt that our job in Detroit was to make blacks aware of their culture, of the problems and some of the ways out of the problems. We’d showcase our artists to young kids at the Graystone Ballroom and it gave us a chance to get the youngsters off the street and see what our image was about ... inspiring them to maybe live up to that imagery. Motown was a tremendous avenue of escape and hope.”
 3. Signed local artists, then groomed them in an assembly line fashion that focused on clothes, demeanor and presentation—all in an attempt to sell the music.

4. Artists of note: The Supremes, The Temptations, Smokey Robinson
 - iii. Soul
 1. Grew out of the black power movement, which sought to help African-Americans embrace their culture
 2. Artists: James Brown, Ray Charles, Wilson Pickett, Aretha Franklin, Solomon Burke
 3. **Play “I’m Black and I’m Proud”** – James Brown, 1968
 - c. Hip-hop
 - i. Context: the excesses of the 80s aren’t reaching black communities. In 1986, 30% of African-American families had a yearly income of less than \$10,000. 34% of African-American teenagers were unemployed, compared to 17% of white teens. Large-scale white exodus from urban centers have left cities reeling economically.
 - ii. Hip-hop begins in the Bronx in the 70s
 - iii. Quickly becomes an urban voice that challenges ideas of progress and bears witness to realities on the ground.
 - iv. Artists: Grandmaster Flash, Public Enemy, NWA
 - v. **Play “Fight the Power”** – Public Enemy, 1989
 - vi. **Play “Mr. Wendal”** – Arrested Development, 1993
 - d. Current movements
 - i. **Play “Jesus Walks”** – Kanye West, 2004
 - ii. **Play “Turn Me Around”** – Mavis Staples, 2007
- V. Questions and comments

CD track listing

1. “Cross Road Blues” by Robert Johnson (1936/37)
2. “Crossroad” by Cream (1969)
3. “Screamin’ and Cryin’” by Muddy Waters (1949)
4. “Tutti Frutti” by Little Richard (1955)
5. “Tutti Frutti” by Pat Boone (1955)
6. “That’s All Right” by Elvis Presley (1954)
7. “The Tracks of My Tears” by Smokey Robinson (1965)
8. “Say it Loud – I’m Black and I’m Proud” by James Brown (1968)
9. “Respect” by Aretha Franklin (1967)
10. “ABC” by The Jackson 5 (1970)
11. “What’s Going On” by Marvin Gaye (1971)
12. “Billie Jean” by Michael Jackson (1982)
13. “Fight the Power” by Public Enemy (1989)
14. “Mr. Wendal” by Arrested Development (1993)
15. “Jesus Walks” by Kanye West (2004)
16. “Turn Me Around” by Mavis Staples (2007)
17. “Baba Says Cool For Thought” by Lupe Fiasco (2008)