

“This Is Ghetto Row”: Musical Segregation in American College Football

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Abstract

A historical overview of college football’s participants exemplifies the diversification of mainstream American culture from the late nineteenth century to the twenty-first. The same cannot be said for the sport’s audience, which remains largely white American. Gerald Gems maintains that football culture reinforces the construction of American identity as “an aggressive, commercial, white, Protestant, male society.” Ken McLeod echoes this perspective in his description of college football’s musical soundscape, “white-dominated hard rock, heavy metal, and country music—in addition to marching bands.” This article examines musical segregation in college football, drawing from case studies and interviews conducted in 2013 with university music coordinators from the five largest collegiate athletic conferences in the United States. These case studies reveal several trends in which music is used as a tool to manipulate and divide college football fans and players along racial lines, including special sections for music associated with blackness, musical selections targeted at recruits, and the continued position of the marching band—a European military ensemble—as the musical representative of the sport. These areas reinforce college football culture as a bastion of white strength despite the diversity among player demographics.

College football is one of the many public stages on which mainstream American culture diversified between the late nineteenth and the twenty-first centuries. In this span, the sport changed from a game played exclusively by whites to one that includes a diverse set of athletes, with white participants making only a slim racial majority in today’s iteration of the game. The sport’s audience, however, has not undergone the same diversification and remains much whiter than the demographics of the participants. The discrepancy between the demographics of the players and the demographics of the audience prompts further consideration as to whether the sport has diversified *audibly*. Based on ethnographic fieldwork I completed in stadiums across the United States in fall 2013, this article establishes the use of music in college football as a means of perpetuating racially segregated sound spaces. That season, I travelled across the United States researching the functions of music in modern college football stadiums. In all, I visited sixteen institutions (Table 1) in the Football Bowl Subdivision (FBS) of the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA), investigating the function of musical and other sonic components heard in college football stadiums.

The universities represented in this study span locations from Florida to Oregon and are all members of the “Power Five” group of conferences, the five largest and wealthiest conglomerates of university athletic departments. These include the Atlantic Coast Conference (ACC), the Big 10, the Big 12, the Pacific 12 (Pac 12), and the Southeastern Conference (SEC). At each institution, I interviewed agents who impact the soundscape of their respective stadiums. Typically, these interviews included at least a member of the marching band staff or a representative of the athletic marketing department from each institution. This article refers to these agents

Table 1. Institutions included in 2013 Research Sample.

Date	City	Home Institution	Conference
August 31	Atlanta, GA	Georgia Institute of Technology (GT)	ACC
September 7	Miami, FL	University of Miami (Miami)	ACC
September 14	Tallahassee, FL	Florida State University (FSU)	ACC
September 21	Columbus, OH	Ohio State University (OSU)	Big 10
September 28	Morgantown, WV	West Virginia University (WVU)	Big 12
October 5	Ann Arbor, MI	University of Michigan (MICH)	Big 10
October 10	Los Angeles, CA	University of Southern California (USC)	Pac 12
October 12	Pasadena, CA	University of California at Los Angeles (UCLA)	Pac 12
October 19	Stanford, CA	Stanford University (STAN)	Pac 12
October 26	Eugene, OR	University of Oregon (UO)	Pac 12
November 2	Bloomington, IN	Indiana University (IU)	Big 10
November 7	Waco, TX	Baylor University (BU)	Big 12
November 9	College Station, TX	Texas A&M University (A&M)	SEC
November 16	Austin, TX	University of Texas at Austin (UT)	Big 12
November 23	West Lafayette, IN	Purdue University (PUR)	Big 10
November 30	Lexington, KY	University of Kentucky (UK)	SEC

as “music coordinators”; in all, I interviewed twenty-eight music coordinators.¹ Based on the information they provided, I came to understand that the soundscapes of college football are constructed in such a way as to only allow for token celebrations of blackness in specific moments while using white sonic icons as the primary sounds associated with the sport’s portrayals of power and victory. In this article, I first establish the historical context of integration in college football at predominantly white colleges and universities as a grounding for the sonic analysis of this study’s fieldwork. Then, I examine three means by which music designates specific racialized spaces in college football stadiums, including specific methods that separate and manipulate along racial boundaries, reinforcing a culture of white dominance and exploiting the efforts of the players on the field.

Integration and College Football

Racial integration in the United States remains an ongoing process, as synthesizing cultures is more difficult and less regulatable than mandating racial proximity. This reality is especially visible in the world of college football, the culture of which was shaped during an era when the game was largely played by white elites before it spread to blue collar and racially diverse communities. As such, there were varying degrees of resistance to any cultural reforms in college football. This rule was particularly true in the South where teams remained racially segregated until the 1970s. The process of integrating these teams was one of the most visible platforms for tensions surrounding racial integration.

¹ Because this project is focused on individuals with the agency and resources to actively shape stadium soundscapes during the gameday events, this article omits the perspectives of fans and players. The barrier of ethnographic access to players is difficult to overcome, as university athletic departments keep players relatively isolated, which is especially true during the football season. Additionally, of the music coordinators included in this study, twenty-three were men, five were women, all were white, and they represented a large span of ages, with people working on the audio production side generally of a younger demographic than those working with the marching bands.

The federal government forced the South to integrate in the late 1950s and 1960s, and even as African American students successfully enrolled in formerly segregated public schools during this period, black students were largely prohibited from representing Southern institutions in athletic competition. Charles Martin explains that for white Southerners, "to compete against an African American, even for a few hours on the football field, would constitute racial equality and thus violate the natural order of white supremacy and black subordination."² Many of the schools making up the SEC refused even to schedule games against integrated teams well into the 1960s. Whereas, in 1965, the University of Kentucky became the first SEC institution to integrate its football team, the symbolic climax of Southern football integration occurred in 1970 when the University of Southern California's integrated team travelled to Tuscaloosa, Alabama to play the all-white University of Alabama team coached by the football legend Paul "Bear" Bryant (1913–1983).³ Despite playing at Alabama's home field in Tuscaloosa, Southern California won handily by a score of 42–21. A number of additional factors contributed to this game's symbolic significance: George Wallace—who served as Alabama's governor in the years 1963 to 1967, and again from 1971 to 1979 and 1983 to 1987—was among the country's most vocal supporters of segregation and had taken an active and public role in attempts to stop integration efforts in Alabama, including physically blocking black students from registering for courses at the University of Alabama in 1963, against federal orders.⁴ One year earlier, Wallace had been elected on a largely segregationist platform, and portrayed himself as an extension of Confederate politics, declaring at his first gubernatorial inauguration,

Today I have stood where once Jefferson Davis stood, and took an oath to my people. It is very appropriate then that from this Cradle of the Confederacy, this very Heart of the Great Anglo-Saxon Southland, that today we sound the drum for freedom as have our generations of forebears before us done, time and again down through history. Let us rise to the call of freedom-loving blood that is in us and send our answer to the tyranny that clanks its chains upon the South. In the name of the greatest people that have ever trod this earth, I draw the line in the dust and toss the gauntlet before the feet of tyranny . . . and I say . . . segregation now . . . segregation tomorrow . . . segregation forever.⁵

² Charles Martin, "Hold That (Color) Line!: Black Exclusion and Southeastern Conference Football," in *Higher Education and the Civil Rights Movement: White Supremacy, Black Southerners, and College Campuses*, ed. Peter Wallenstein (Gainesville, FL: University Press of Florida, 2008), 166–67.

³ Martin, "Hold That (Color) Line!," 173–75. The University of Kentucky signed Nate Northington, the college's first black football player in 1965, who enrolled the next year, and first competed in a game in 1967. On September 30 of that year, he briefly played against the University of Mississippi before suffering an injury, but in doing so he became the first black football player to play in the SEC. However, Kentucky's basketball team led by legendary coach Adolph Rupp lagged far behind with its integration efforts, famously losing to an all-black Texas Western lineup in the 1966 NCAA finals. A black athlete did not play for Kentucky's men's basketball program until Tom Payne suited up for the 1970–71 season.

⁴ For more information on George Wallace, see Jeff Frederick, *Stand Up for Alabama: Governor George Wallace* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2007).

⁵ Punctuation and capitalization taken from the original text. For a facsimile of Wallace's original speech, see George Wallace, "The Inaugural Address of Governor George C. Wallace," Al.com, <http://web.archive.org/web/20190809104517/http://media.al.com/spotnews/other/George%20Wallace%201963%20Inauguration%20Speech.pdf>. For a video of Wallace's speech, see the Alabama

Contributing to the significance of Southern California's football victory over Alabama, many of Southern California's star offensive players were black, and Alabama's supporters saw black players repeatedly demonstrate their athletic capabilities on the football field. The result of this game likely increased Alabama's fans' and administrators' readiness to accept black athletes at their institution as a means of returning to national competitiveness. After Southern California's victory, Alabama quickly diversified its team and included black athletes on the varsity football roster the following year. After Alabama's team was integrated, each of the remaining all-white SEC football teams took similar steps, with the University of Mississippi completing the process in 1972.⁶

As mentioned above, the process of athletic integration in college athletics has proven to be much more complicated than simply achieving equality through the addition of black athletes to the teams of predominantly white institutions. By the time college football was fully integrated in 1972, intercollegiate football was over one hundred years old, dating from the first series played between Princeton University and Rutgers University in November 1869.⁷ By the 1970s, college football games had long-established repertoires of cheers and marching band selections.⁸ These and other cultural elements were largely cemented decades earlier, preserving cultural elements of the game's earlier days, when both the players and the fans were less diverse. After the introduction of public address (PA) systems into stadiums in 1929, more styles of music—both live and pre-recorded—found their way into stadiums, though college football was slow to add elements that affected the established culture of the game.⁹ While all major college stadiums eventually incorporated amplified popular music, in many cases there was some resistance to these infrastructure updates for fear that a school's rituals, sounds, and culture would be altered. One such case was the final stadium in major college football to incorporate amplified popular music: Michigan Stadium. The University of Michigan added amplified popular music to their stadium in 2009, eighty years after music was first performed through a PA system at a sporting event. This addition caused a significant amount of public concern, which one blogger summarized when he described a game in Michigan Stadium as “an exercise in living the past, the present, and the future.” He continued, “I hope that in 2029, my children's

Department of Archives & History, “George Wallace 1963 Inauguration Address,” YouTube video, http://web.archive.org/web/20181215031913/https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_RC0EjsUbDU.

⁶ For more information on the integration of SEC football, see Martin, “Hold that (Color) Line!”

⁷ For more on the historical development of American football, see Mark F. Bernstein, *Football: The Ivy League Origins of an American Obsession* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2001).

⁸ Arthur Bartner, the long-time band director of the University of Southern California Marching Band, has written on the early development of college marching bands and their repertoires. See Bartner, “The Evolution and Development of the University and College Marching Band” (master's thesis, University of Michigan, 1963).

⁹ Charles Hiroshi Garrett, “Struggling to Define a Nation: American Music in the Twentieth Century” (PhD diss., University of California, Los Angeles, 2004), 223. Also of note: in 1941 Chicago's Wrigley Field became the first major league baseball park to project an organist through their public address system.

experience with Michigan football is fundamentally the same."¹⁰ Clearly, the perception of purity is critical to some college football fans who seek to preserve the sport's historic presentation.

In keeping with the inelasticity of college football culture, racial integration did little to disrupt the control of whites over an increasingly affluent college athletics industry. In *Forty Million Dollar Slaves*, William Rhoden argues that integration allowed "the whites who controlled the sports-industrial complex . . . to exploit black muscle and talent, thus sucking the life out of black institutions, while at the same time giving themselves credit for being humanitarians."¹¹ This system led to significant isolation for black athletes on predominantly white campuses, locking into place a number of issues including "a destructive power dynamic between black talent and white ownership; a chronic psychological burden for black athletes, who constantly had to prove their worth; disconnection of the athlete from his or her community; and the emergence of the apolitical black athlete, who had to be careful what he or she said or stood for, so as not to offend white paymasters."¹² Rhoden additionally argues that integration destroyed football at Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs), which had some of the nation's most successful football programs through the mid-twentieth century. The loss of HBCU programs effectively "eliminat[ed] every black person involved in sports—coaches, owners, trainers, accountants, lawyers, secretaries, and so on—except the precious on-the-field-talent."¹³ As black athletes increased their presence in mainstream college football, the sport's white power brokers remained, effectively hindering college football's culture from diversifying alongside its athletes.

In the four decades since the SEC fully integrated its teams, college football experienced tremendous growth in popularity. During this time, diversity flourished among its participants. According to the NCAA's self-reported race and gender demographics, in 2019, 61 percent of the student-athletes who participated in SEC football identified as black and 31 percent as white.¹⁴ Michael Oriard states that although such figures suggest the "absolute triumph of merit over racial prejudice," the "reality, of course, is more complicated, not just because the men with the headsets on the sidelines remain disproportionately white and those in the owners' [or perhaps university presidents'] suites exclusively so, but also because race itself is so burdened with loaded significance in the United States."¹⁵ Previous scholarship

¹⁰ David Mekelburg, "No Music in Michigan Stadium," *Splice Today* (blog), September 17, 2009, <https://www.splicetoday.com/sports/no-music-in-michigan-stadium>.

¹¹ William Rhoden, *Forty Million Dollar Slaves: The Rise, Fall, and Redemption of the Black Athlete* (New York: Crown Publishers, 2006), 135.

¹² Rhoden, *Forty Million Dollar Slaves*, 142.

¹³ Rhoden, *Forty Million Dollar Slaves*, 142.

¹⁴ Data from the NCAA's "NCAA Demographics Database," <http://www.ncaa.org/about/resources/research/ncaa-demographics-database> (accessed April 29, 2020). As a point of comparison, according to the University of Central Florida's Institute for Diversity and Ethics in Sport, in 2012 the National Football League was 66 percent black and 30 percent white. For more information, see Richard Lapchick, "The 2013 Racial and Gender Report Card: National Football League," http://web.archive.org/web/20140831103354/http://www.tidesport.org/RGRC/2013/2013_NFL_RGRC.pdf.

¹⁵ Michael Oriard, *Brand N.F.L.: Making and Selling America's Favorite Sport* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2007), 210–11.

has established the perpetual “whiteness” of football culture, attributing this to the sport’s origins in mid-to-late-nineteenth century Ivy League institutions. Gerald Gems posits that football remains “a weekly anthropological play,” whose “symbols, rituals, and ceremonies” reflect conservative American cultural values. For Gems, football’s pageantry depicts the United States as “an aggressive, commercial, white, Protestant, male society that allowed for the expression of pluralistic values and the limited inclusion of others.”¹⁶

In line with Gems’s synopsis, college football’s audience is primarily white. While the 2010 US census found that the country as a whole is 63.7 percent white and 12.2 percent black, Nielsen’s 2013 television ratings report found that television audiences for NCAA football bowl games were 82 percent white, 13 percent black, and 4 percent Hispanic. These figures indicate that whites are a disproportionate majority of college football fans. For additional context, the same Nielsen report found the NFL’s television audience to be 77 percent white, 15 percent black, and 8 percent Hispanic, numbers more commensurate with the demographics of the nation.¹⁷ The discrepancies between the demographics of the players and that of the audience/administration, combined with the lack of pay for college athletes despite ever-increasing revenues, prompted Billy Hawkins to describe contemporary college athletics as “The New Plantation.”¹⁸

Even the architectural design of college football stadiums reinforces Hawkins’s observation as the structures function as inverse Panopticons, prisons intended for surveillance proposed by British philosopher Jeremy Bentham (1747–1832).¹⁹ Whereas Bentham designed such structures for a small number of individuals to be able to observe a much larger number of people, stadiums allow a powerful majority—consisting of a fanbase that is whiter than the country—to observe the actions of a small number of athletes, a majority of whom are black. In this sense, the cultural effect of these facilities fulfills Michel Foucault’s description of

¹⁶ Gerald Gems, *For Pride, Profit, and Patriarchy: Football and the Incorporation of American Cultural Values* (Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Press, 2000), 195–96.

¹⁷ For more on the racial distribution of the 2010 US census, see Karen R. Humes, Nicholas A. Jones, and Roberto R. Ramirez, “Overview of Race and Hispanic Origin: 2010,” *2010 Census Briefs*, C2010BR-02 (March 24, 2011), 4, <https://web.archive.org/web/20200428025823/https://www.census.gov/prod/cen2010/briefs/c2010br-02.pdf>. See also Jeffrey S. Passel, D’Vera Cohn, and Mark Hugo Lopez’s analysis of race and identity of the 2010 census, “Hispanics Account for More Than Half of Nation’s Growth in Past Decade,” *Pew Research*, March 24, 2011, <http://web.archive.org/web/20191230191418/https://www.pewresearch.org/hispanic/2011/03/24/hispanics-account-for-more-than-half-of-nations-growth-in-past-decade/>. For more on racial distribution of sports audiences, see Nielsen, *Year in Sports Media Report 2013* (New York, NY: The Nielsen Company, 2013), <http://web.archive.org/web/20180722071754/http://www.nielsen.com/content/dam/corporate/us/en/reports-downloads/2014%20Reports/year-in-sports-media-report-2013.pdf>. Additionally, Michael Oriard recently asserted that the National Football League’s audience “has become virtually alone in size and, more importantly, in crossing gender, class, racial, ethnic, geographical, and political (red state, blue state) lines,” distinguishing it from the more homogenous college football audience. See Oriard, “Foreword: Football as Mediated Spectacle” in *The NFL: Critical and Cultural Perspectives* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2015), ix.

¹⁸ Billy Hawkins, *The New Plantation: Black Athletes, College Sports, and Predominantly White N.C.A.A. Institutions* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010).

¹⁹ For more on Bentham and the Panopticon, see Janet Sample, *Bentham’s Prison: A Study of the Panopticon Penitentiary* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993).

the Panopticon’s power, namely that it “induce[s] in the inmate a state of conscious and permanent visibility that assures the automatic functioning of power. . . . This architectural apparatus should be a machine for creating and sustaining a power relation independent of the person who exercises it; in short, that the inmates should be caught up in a power situation of which they are themselves the bearers.”²⁰ If one substitutes the word “player” for “inmate” in the previous quote, Foucault’s description applies to the relationship between the sport’s players and those people seated in the stadium. The very act of playing football for an audience creates a power dynamic in which the players’ performance seeks the imagined support of the fans. With college athletes receiving no monetary compensation for their labors, their performance on the very visible stage of a football field determines their value, both because their scholarships are dependent on their athletic accomplishments, and because many of these athletes aspire to advance to football’s professional level.²¹ This lopsided power dynamic prompts further consideration of the role of music in the negotiating between the perpetual whiteness of college football culture amid the shifting demographics of the game’s athletes.

Musical Segregation

The combination of college football’s established musical culture and the disparity between the demographics of college football’s audience and those of its athletes has led the sport’s soundscape to be largely structured along racial lines, with the majority of the music heard during gameplay targeting the majority white audience. Ken McLeod describes the racial power dynamic at play regarding the sport’s audience and its soundscape, arguing that the game “recreates the ideology and tactics of European colonial expansion” through its inherent gameplay mechanics that involve taking territory from one’s opponent in order to gain points. McLeod reinforces this critical reading by citing the game’s soundscape, which largely consists of “white-dominated hard rock, heavy metal, and country music—in addition to marching bands.”²² Indeed, college football games are extremely musical events that extend well before and after gameplay actually begins. Based on my interviews with a national sample of music coordinators, I posit that a college football stadium’s soundscape is divided into two primary sections: 1) a “warm-up” period prior to the main game that largely features music played through the PA system, and 2) the primary event. In my reading, the former typically includes canned popular music selections, while the latter space is organized around the back-and-forth negotiation between the music provided by the marching band and that sounded via the PA system. The first section begins hours before the game starts, with music sounding into a largely empty stadium until the athletes take the field for warm-up

²⁰ Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: Vintage, 1977), 201.

²¹ For more information on the tension between universities’ academic and athletic interests, see John Thelin, *Games Colleges Play: Scandal and Reform in Intercollegiate Athletics* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996).

²² Ken McLeod, “We Are the Champions”: *The Politics of Sports and Popular Music* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2011), 137.

exercises and then returning to the locker room. The second section begins roughly a half hour before the start of a game, when the university marching band takes the field to perform a pregame show. These shows typically include several school-specific fight songs or crowd favorites alongside patriotic fare, and then conclude with the athletes running onto the field for gameplay. For the remainder of the game, producers coordinate popular music played through the PA—largely drawn from the genres cited by McLeod above—with selections by the marching band filling as much downtime as possible and including tunes that prompt crowd cheering or jeering, keeping audiences as involved in the game as possible.

There are also numerous examples of non-white-dominated genres that are included within the gameday event, but these are frequently isolated to the warm-up period. One such example of this practice comes from a September 28, 2013 game between the West Virginia University Mountaineers and the Oklahoma State University Cowboys, played in Morgantown, West Virginia. Before this game, one member of the university's athletics marketing staff, whom this essay will identify as Richard, candidly described the practicality and function of utilizing sound-spaces created along racial lines as a means of organizing music within college football stadiums.²³ Richard first mentioned his conceptualization of separate musical spaces while answering a few introductory questions about how musical examples were scripted during the event. Richard explained that the production booth begins playing music when the gates are opened hours before a game starts. These selections include “popular-but-serious music,” such as Imagine Dragon’s “Radioactive” (2012). He then explained that there is a shift in musical style once players come onto the field to warm up: “Once running back, quarterback is out on the field, then we want to get a little bit heavier with the music. . . . The phrase we use [to describe this music]—without using racism, obviously—is to get a little bit ghetto with it.” Richard continued his description of this strategy, explaining that once the full team is on the field, “we’re into full ghetto, hardcore,” except that the music was all “PG-rated.”²⁴

Later in our conversation, Richard elaborated on the logistics of playing musical selections within the stadium. He explained that he organizes songs into rows on a pre-loaded audio controller (Figure 1). These selections are sorted according to “scenario,” which he described, “I’ve got my **festive** row here: ‘Thank God I’m a Country Boy’ is very popular here, ‘Jump Around’ is very popular here, ‘Shout.’ This is **pre-team and offense**. This is **ghetto** row. This is kind of **miscellaneous** stuff. This is **bring-defense-on**. This is **party time**.”²⁵ Richard’s “ghetto row” included, listed left to right, Rich Gang’s “Have it Your Way” (featuring T.I., Birdman, and Lil Wayne, 2013), Ace Hood’s “Bugatti” (2013), 2 Chainz and Wiz Khalifa’s “We Own It” (2013), Travi\$ Scott’s “Upper Echelon” (featuring T.I. and

²³ Due to the sensitive material discussed in this article, I have given this interviewee the alias, “Richard.” Richard, interview by author, September 27, 2013, West Virginia University.

²⁴ Richard also stated that the actual first players on the field are the “kickers and specialists,” but that he does not adjust musical style until running backs and quarterbacks are on the field. Kickers and specialists remain the least diverse among all those on the football field, as the vast majority of these players are white.

²⁵ Emphasis added to clarify the names designated to each row on the audio controller.

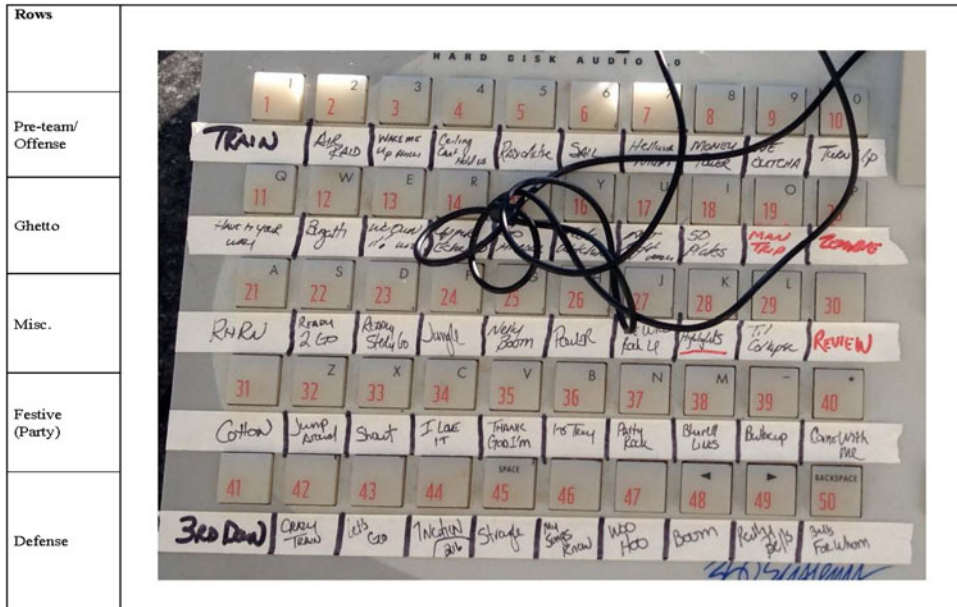


Figure 1. West Virginia’s musical selection control board and its corresponding “rows.” Photo by author. September 27, 2013.

2 Chainz, 2013), Wayne Marshall’s “Go Harder” (featuring Ace Hood, Waca Flocka, and Cham, 2013), an unidentified selection obscured by the chord in the image, Yo Gotti’s “Act Right” (featuring Jeezy and YG, 2013), Rich Gang’s “50 Plates” (featuring Rick Ross, 2013), and Ace Hood’s “Goin’ Down” (featuring Meek Mill, 2013), which is labeled as “Man Trip,” named for the team’s ceremonial march to the stadium from the practice facilities.

Richard explained that West Virginia uses a dedicated, targeted row of recent rap selections to create a distinct, player-centered soundscape during the pregame warm-up period. He largely relied on rap selections for this space. At the conclusion of the “warm-up” period, the main event begins, and the transition between these periods is typically when spectators begin to fill the stadium. With the entrance of the marching band for the pregame show, the stadium’s soundscape shifts to one that, as Rhoden, Gems, and McLeod affirm, marks football’s pageantry as a celebration of whiteness. While my informants at other institutions did not describe their approach to stadium soundscapes in quite such stark terms, I found three programming strategies held in common between the college football stadiums in this study that illustrate how college football’s sonic culture remains grounded in its whiteness despite the dramatic expansion of diversity among the game’s actual participants.

Players’ Music

I refer to the first strategy as “players’ music,” which refers to specific musical genres that are assigned to athletes. To return to Richard from West Virginia University, when asked about the process by which he chose the musical selection heard in

the stadium, including those from the player warm-up period, he detailed his connection to the athletics staff, with whom he works to craft an exciting musical atmosphere that increases the athletes' energy level *before* the game:

I work with . . . the [football team's] video coordinator, and say, "What songs are they listening to during practice? What songs do they like? What do they want to hear pregame?" And, usually, you talk to seniors about what they like to hear, what they don't like to hear, stuff like that. So, when it comes time for "ghetto time," there's about five or six songs. We get all our commercial breaks out of the way so that when our full team is on the field, it's nothing but music to get them hyped for the game. It's a big deal. It's a big deal. Music is a big deal.

This informant's description points to a certain level of agency and preference on the part of the players—albeit via a mediator in the form of a member of the team's administration—in determining what music sounds during this warm-up period. It is also worth noting that, while the team is racially diverse, the team's collective musical preferences are still designated to "ghetto row" to be heard during the warm-up period, which Richard also designates as "ghetto time." His double use of the term "ghetto" here reinforces their message that the target audience in this space is a marginalized group distinguished from the majority audience by their higher level of diversity and a narrower age range. It bears mentioning that the terms "ghetto row" and "ghetto time" are misnomers that suggest that predominantly or historically black genres are isolated from country's mainstream culture, when the reality is that black musical styles, in particular rap, are central within current American popular music. Richard further distinguished his motivations for music heard *after* the warm-up period, during the primary event. In this section "it's not about getting the players hyped up. It's the fans that are going to get the players loud at this point. It's the fans that are going to get loud, and you want to play stuff that the fans are going to get loud to. A loud crowd energizes a football player." With these statements, Richard articulated his conceptualization of two separate musical spaces, one organized in coordination with the coaching staff and directed towards the players on the field, and another aimed at the audience in the stands.

In every pregame case study collected in this project, the hosting institution utilized the format described above: special musical selections directed toward players during the pregame warm-ups, mostly consisting of rap. [Table 2](#) outlines the selections encountered during these warm-up periods. Specific to one of the metal selections included on this list, the University of Michigan's production team chose to play Ozzy Osbourne's "I Don't Want to Stop," specifically for its then-football coach, Brady Hoke. An informant in Michigan's athletics office explained to me that Hoke, "is a huge Ozzy Osbourne fan, and so we'll throw a song in for him . . . just to get it in."²⁶ Otherwise, there is a very clear trend throughout these selections: rap is the sound of "ghetto row."

Logistically, players leave the field at the end of warm-ups to conduct last-minute preparations in the locker room and to don their full armor, including the pads and helmets that exaggerate their masculinity and, on one hand, function as a means of

²⁶ Ryan Duey, interview by author, October 4, 2013, University of Michigan.

Table 2. Popular Music Selections During Player Warm-Ups.

Institution	Selection	Performer	Genre
OSU	"Go Off" (2012)	KB	Rap
OSU	"Momentum" (2012)	Stevie Stone	Rap
WVU	"Turn Up" (2012)	Gent & Jawns	Rap
MICH	"Started from the Bottom" (2013)	Drake	Rap
MICH	"Swag Surfin'" (2009)	F.L.Y. (Fast Life Youngsters)	Rap
MICH	"All the Way Turnt Up" (2010)	Roscoe Dash	Rap
MICH	"I Don't Want to Stop" (2007)	Ozzy Osbourne	Metal
MICH	"Let's Go" (2004)	Lil Jon	Rap
MICH	"We Still in This, Bitch" (2013)	B.o.B.	Rap
MICH	"We Own It" (2013)	2 Chainz	Rap
MICH	"Remember the Name" (2005)	Fort Minor	Rap
UO	"Public Service Announcement" (2003)	Jay Z	Rap
UO	"Stronger" (2007)	Kanye West	Rap
UO	"Get Lucky" (2013)	Daft Punk	Pop
UO	"Joker and the Thief" (2005)	Wolfmother	Metal
UO	"Blow Up" (2010)	J. Cole	Rap
IU	"Heart of a Champion" (2004)	Nelly	Rap
IU	"Throw it Up" (2002)	Lil Jon & the East Side Boyz	Rap
A&M	"You Don't Want These Problems" (2013)	DJ Khaled	Rap
A&M	"Lose My Mind" (2010)	Young Jeezy	Rap
A&M	"Be a G" (2013)	Project Pat	Rap
A&M	"4 What" (2013)	DJ Drama	Rap
UT	"I'm a Coke Boy" (2013)	Chinx Drugz	Rap
UT	"Ball" (2012)	T.I.	Rap

While the majority of these performers are black, that trend certainly is not universal. Gent & Jawns are white. Fort Minor is a group led by Japanese-American Mike Shinoda. Chinx Drugz is a multi-ethnic group. It is also worth noting that KB, heard at Ohio State, is a Christian rap artist. Finally, my arrival time in stadiums fluctuated from an hour or more before a game started to a few minutes before kickoff, depending on if I was entering the stadium with the band, being hosted with the production team, or had a typical ticket. For this reason, some institutions are represented with several selections, some with only one or two, and some are not included.

protection, but on the other, allow players to use their bodies as weapons against their opponents. This transition is paralleled by a musical stylistic shift as the band comes onto the field to begin its pregame show: from this point on, musical selections are predominantly white-oriented. Table 3 outlines the most commonly played musical performers or performing groups encountered in this study outside of school-specific tunes, such as fight songs. These figures are organized according to the number of stadiums in which each musician or ensemble was encountered as a means of demonstrating their level of saturation across this sample of games. Aside from the aforementioned school-specific tunes, this data encompasses all selections, including both the pre- and postgame tunes performed by the band or played through the sound system. Six of the seven most encountered performers are white, with a six-way tie for the eighth most encountered, four of which are also white. Aside from Kanye West's presence in seven stadiums, no black recording artist was encountered in any more than five stadiums. In terms of genre, this sample is heavily weighted towards white rock and heavy metal, in keeping with McLeod's reading of the sport's soundscape. Additionally, the most popular rapper on the list happens to be white, Macklemore, with another white rapper, Eminem, tied for the third-most encounters alongside Lil Jon. Again, Table 3 does not list most

Table 3. Most Frequently Played Performers or Performing Groups by Race.

Performer	Race	Stadiums	Institutions
White Stripes	White	11	GT, Miami, OSU, WVU, MICH, USC, UO, IU, UT, PUR, UK
Kernkraft 400	White	10	GT, Miami, FSU, WVU, USC, STAN, UO, UM, PUR, UK
Fall Out Boy	White	8	GT, FSU, WVU, USC, UO, IU, PUR, UK
AC/DC	White	8	Miami, OSU, WVU, MICH, STAN, BU, PUR, UK
Macklemore and Ryan Lewis	White	8	Miami, FSU, OSU, WVU, IU, BU, PUR, UK
Kanye West	Black	7	Miami, USC, UO, BU, A&M, PUR, UK
Ozzy Osbourne	White	6	WVU, MICH, UCLA, IU, PUR, UK
Guns 'N Roses	White	5	Miami, UCLA, IU, BU, PUR
Led Zeppelin	White	5	Miami, MICH, BU, UT, UK
Metallica	White	5	Miami, UCLA, IU, PUR, UK
Eminem	White	5	WVU, MICH, USC, IU, PUR
Lil Jon	Black	5	Miami, MICH, IU, UT, PUR
Isley Brothers	Black	5	MICH, USC, UO, PUR
Jay Z	Black	4	Miami, UO, PUR, UK

commonly heard music in stadiums: fight songs, alma maters, classical compositions, and/or movie themes, and most of these selections are iconic of whiteness.

In sum, there are two musical periods in a college football stadium: a period prior to the main event during which selections associated with blackness are isolated, and the main game period in which selections associated with whiteness dominate the remainder of the soundscape. These two spaces are not equally weighted, as the white space consumes the entire three-to-four-hour span of college football games, while the warm-up period during which “players’ music” is featured typically lasts less than an hour and is far removed from actual gameplay. This placement also means that the “players’ music” will have a limited audience, since most spectators arrive closer to the start of gameplay. Using this temporal division, college football’s music coordinators maximize their cultural appeal to the primarily white audience. This separation reflects trends towards restricting and controlling black athletes across all American professional sports, a situation described by Rhoden:

Despite their fifty-year rise to prominence on the fields of integrated sports, African American athletes—male and female—still find themselves on the periphery of true power in the industry their talent built. In the public mind, the black athlete is still largely feared and despised, in keeping with the history of black Americans, whose success is often seen as an imminent danger. . . . The strategies of the white reactionaries have become predictable: to take back, dilute, divide, and push back any black achievement, in an effort to restore the same balance of power that has existed in this country since slavery, one in which the bulk of the rewards reaped from black talent and labor are distributed to and serve to perpetuate white power.²⁷

For college football, black bodies are welcome tools as long as they serve football’s power mechanisms that celebrate white strength. Any such selections that do make

²⁷ Rhoden, *Forty Million Dollar Slaves*, 2.

their way into the stadium are processed through the strategies described above: “dilute[d], divide[d], and push[ed] back” into an isolated musical space that allows for perpetuation of the sport’s predominantly white culture while portraying the same sport in a vastly different light to the athletes who actually compete on the field.

A few universities included in this study took additional steps to remove “players’ music” from the experience of the audience by utilizing field-level sound systems. In these cases, stadiums’ built-in PA systems are bypassed in favor of special sets of field-level speakers, keeping players’ music directionally focused on the field and away from the stands. At the Indiana University game against the University of Minnesota on November 2, 2013, while the team warmed up to selections by Nelly and Lil Jon, the production booth played advertisements and videos over the full-stadium PA system. The producer’s attempt to have distinct but overlapping sonic spaces resulted in a somewhat disjointed and unorganized soundscape as the music on the field had to be loud enough for the players to enjoy, whereas the stadium audio had to be loud enough that the audience could ignore the players’ music. The University of Kentucky utilizes a similar system, playing warm-up selections through field-level speakers. These speakers are then turned around and directed into the audience during the game, and, from that point on, they serve as amplification for the marching band (Figure 2). This speaker-adjustment has a clear message: that music is for them (the players); this music is for us (the audience).

Music as Recruiting Device

The second strategy by which music maintains a culture of segregation in college football lies in the realm of recruiting. Competition between universities for talented football prospects is fierce, and fan obsession over the results has generated a recruiting-information industry consisting of websites that follow these coveted athletes and analyze their comments to uncover clues as to which school they will ultimately attend. These websites generate millions of dollars annually speculating on the futures of high school athletes by selling access to this information to supporters of these teams.²⁸ In this environment, universities go to great lengths to gain any advantage over other institutions in attracting top talent, and music provides a means to this end. Richard explained how West Virginia utilizes music along these lines:

As soon as I see the players step into [*sic*] the field, I play this song [plays Ace Hood – “Goin Down”]. Get the graphics rolling. We do live shots to kind of get them hyped. It’s more to impress the recruits than anything. Everything we do is about recruiting. Everything. Everything we try to do is for recruiting, in all sports. If a coach says, ‘Please don’t do that,’ you know, you debate with him, and okay, Coach doesn’t think it is going to help

²⁸ One such website, Rivals.com, was sold to Yahoo! in 2010 for about \$100 million. Other sites include *ESPN Recruiting Nation*, *Scout.com* (owned by Fox), *MaxPreps* (owned by CBS) and *247Sports.com*. See Darren Rovell, “Yahoo Buys Rivals.com: Is the Deal Worth It?,” CNBC, updated August 5, 2010, <http://web.archive.org/web/20190404224940/http://www.cnbc.com/id/19340539>.



Figure 2. Field-Level Speakers (circled in yellow) at the University of Kentucky. Photo by author. November 30, 2013.

us get recruits, then we won't do it. . . . So, we try to make sure that recruits are on the field, recruits want to hear their music, and we're trying to impress seventeen-year-old kids at that point. [plays Yo Gotti's "Act Right"]. We're not trying to impress fans. We're not trying to make fans happy or sad. If fans don't like it, they can leave. We're trying to impress recruits during warm-ups. So, we play recruiting music. . . . If you go to a stadium, and you're a seventeen-year-old kid, and they're playing Robin Thicke and Britney Spears and shit like that, why would you go there? When I come here, and I know that warm-up/pregame I'm going to get hyped because I'm hearing Jeezy, and I'm hearing, you know, Rick Ross, and Ace Hood, all those things. It makes a difference, it really does.²⁹

Here, music is a coercive tool wielded by the athletic department to relate the institution to the young, diverse recruits. Additionally, every selection on West Virginia's "ghetto row" contains stories of luxury and big spending, and most detail first-person accounts of transitioning from poverty to riches. In the context in which football recruits encounter these selections, West Virginia is suggesting that playing football for its team is the gateway to similar wealth, although statistics show that less than four percent of college football players will play the game at a professional level.³⁰

²⁹ Richard, interview.

³⁰ The NCAA reports that 3.7 percent of college football players move on to compete professionally, whether in the National Football League, the Canadian Football League, or in Arena League Football. If one narrows the "professional" field to just the National Football League, categorized as "Major Pro" by the NCAA, that number drops to 1.6 percent. However, if one only considers athletes from the Power Five conferences, rather than all levels of college football, the percentage of football players who move on to the NFL increases to 10.1 percent. That figure increases to 16.4 percent if one includes all of football's professional levels. For more, see "Estimated Probability of Competing in

Schools across the country use racially organized musical spaces as manipulative recruiting tools. Jennifer Martin, a member of Texas A&M University’s marketing staff, referenced the recruiting strategy of her former employer, the University of Alabama:

Coach [Nick] Saban was very adamant about pumping in music and playing it loud and making it deafening in Bryant-Denny stadium. And he said, “If you get any phone calls about the type of music you are playing or the loudness of the music, you say, ‘Do you want to have recruits come in? This is how you’re going to get them. Do you like winning? Well this is how you’re going to get them.’”³¹

Here, Martin recalls Saban’s demand to utilize music to give Alabama’s recruiting mission an advantage. Note that Saban also believes that any fans objecting to the style or volume of the stadium’s musical selections will be more tolerant of the situation once they are informed as to the advantages provided by such music, which should be enough to justify its presence and decibel level. Jeremy Armstrong from the University of Texas at Austin’s athletic marketing department said that recruiting is:

one of the biggest things. . . . The football department, they’ve expanded it dramatically and they brought in a new person who’s very energetic, cutting-edge as far as recruiting goes. So, we’ve met multiple times on what we can do to try to make our gameday experience inviting to them [recruits] so they’ll want to come here. And also, as far as programming, knowing when [the recruits are] going to be in their seats and when they are not going to be there, so that we feature some of our best pieces when they are there, and they don’t miss out on them.³²

Note that the process of making “them . . . want to come *here*” (emphasis mine) involves the university giving an impression to the recruits watching the game that differs from the typical audience members’ impressions. Without access to the recruits’ schedules, it is impossible to know exactly how music may have been tailored towards them during any particular moment of the games I attended during this research. However, it is worth mentioning that after the game began between the University of Texas and Oklahoma State University on November 16, 2013, only one musical selection played over the PA system was by a black performer: Lil Jon’s “Turn Down for What,” which sounded during the break between the third and fourth quarters.

The act of attracting potential recruits to campus is a process described by Rhoden as the “Conveyor Belt,” which summarizes how black athletes are extracted from their communities and put to work in mainstream athletics. As competition for black athletes increased over the twentieth century, “predominantly white colleges and universities . . . were now twisting themselves like pretzels to recruit them. Schools that had long disdained African American athletes were now going out of their way to bring them on campus by any means necessary. The arms

Professional Athletics,” NCAA, updated April 8, 2020, <https://web.archive.org/web/20200419014505/http://www.ncaa.org/about/resources/research/estimated-probability-competing-professional-athletics>.

³¹ Jennifer Martin, interview by author, November 12, 2013, Texas A&M University.

³² Jeremy Armstrong, interview by author, November 14, 2013, University of Texas at Austin.

race was on.”³³ The competition for black athletes’ services became so great that many universities resorted to deception as a means of getting them to campus. Tate Locke’s tenure as the basketball coach at Clemson, where he served from 1970 to 1975, provides one of the more egregious examples of misrepresenting one’s institution to black athletes, one that relied on music and dance as a central component. Whereas Locke was guilty of a number of recruiting violations—including paying players, falsifying grades, and providing vehicles to athletes—he most famously created a fictitious black fraternity to mislead recruits into believing that Clemson was a more diverse community than it was in reality. Locke took “over an old Quonset hut on campus and convert[ed] it into a lounge. . . . When he wanted to impress a black recruit, he had people go into the surrounding communities and bring back as many high school students as possible to populate the building. These were the fraternity ‘members.’ Locke then hired bands and staged dances. When the recruit came in, he would be surrounded by a façade of minority bliss on campus.”³⁴ While I could find no records of exactly what music was played in these fictitious fraternities, it is at least obvious that music played a central role in Locke’s cultural façade. Although Locke’s strategy is more active in its deception, the distinct musical spaces within contemporary college football stadiums represent an extension of the same goals: provide the impression of familiarity to visiting recruits, while preserving the sport’s predominant culture.³⁵

It is likely that the use of music as a manipulative tool in recruiting visits extends well beyond the game experience. Recruiting visits to college campuses typically last a full weekend, and some prospects will return to one institution multiple times over their high school career. Music serves an important role for universities during these visits. It is especially troubling that schools are essentially using music as a coercive device when one considers the potential depth of the deception. This practice likely continues throughout a Power Five athlete’s entire collegiate career, as they continue to progress through the Conveyor Belt system that keeps athletes isolated from the general student body. This situation remains reminiscent of what Jack Olsen described in his 1968 *Sports Illustrated* exposé, “The Black Athlete—A Shameful Story.” Olsen highlighted how college athletic programs used black athletes to generate large amounts of income for universities, whereas little to no attention was being paid to the athletes’ academic success. Olsen even called into question one of the single games typically heralded as a major triumph for racial equality:

Two years ago the all-black starters of Texas at El Paso defeated the all-white team of the University of Kentucky for the NCAA basketball championship, and the nationally televised game brought cries of joy to black militants and white liberals alike. If they had scratched a millimeter below the surface they would have realized that the victory was shallow. Of the five white players who started the game for Kentucky, five graduated. Of the five black players who started for UT at El Paso, none have graduated. Nor have the other two Negroes who

³³ Rhoden, *Forty Million Dollar Slaves*, 175.

³⁴ Rick Telander, “The Descent of a Man,” *Sports Illustrated*, March 8, 1982, 67.

³⁵ For more on Locke’s tenure at Clemson, see his autobiography, *Caught in the Net* (West Point, NY: Leisure Press, 1982).

were sitting on the Texas at El Paso bench. But they were not attending college for that purpose. They were there as black hired hands to bring a national championship to the little-known school, and the matter of their education ranked a distant second. A couple of them are still hanging around El Paso playing in pickup basketball games and making a buck.³⁶

Though Olsen's article is over forty years old, collegiate athletics are still dealing with many of the same issues. According to a 2013 study by Shaun Harper, Collin Williams Jr., and Horatio Blackman, graduation rates for black male athletes lag behind those of their peer groups: "50.2% of Black male student-athletes graduated within six years, compared to 66.9% of student-athletes overall, 72.8% of undergraduate students overall, and 55.5% of Black undergraduate men overall."³⁷ In the context of college football's segregated soundscape, music provides one means by which universities communicate to recruits that their institution will be a familiar and safe environment for them to pursue their dreams of athletic (and financial) success. However, once the recruits arrive on campus, they are put to work generating millions of dollars annually for an academic institution, while trying to remain on the Conveyor Belt that prioritizes their physical performance over their educational development.

Marching Bands and White Power

The third strategy by which college football retains its predominantly white sonic culture is connected with the musical ensemble most associated with college football: the marching band. Recall the two functions of musical spaces described over this article's previous two sections—separation and manipulation—as well as my informant Richard's description of the primary event as being "band oriented."³⁸ Even in this space, most universities in this study employ a producer/director within the athletics department who dictates the specific moments that the band may play, though they typically allow bands to choose their own repertoire.³⁹ Therefore, while the proportion of a game soundscape's orientation towards the band varies from one institution to another, Jason Dennard, an employee of Florida State's athletic marketing department, estimated that 80 percent of the music heard during its football games is provided by the marching band.⁴⁰ This is the space that accompanies the game's violent action, and as such it is associated with strength, power, and conquest. Here, the marching band, with its background as a tool of European war, plays "fight songs," "war hymns," and various other sonic cues that unite the crowd in displays of power and dominance, such as audience members joining

³⁶ Jack Olsen, "The Black Athlete: A Shameful Story," *Sports Illustrated*, July 1, 1968, 27.

³⁷ Shaun R. Harper, Collin D. Williams Jr., and Horatio Blackman, "Black Male Student-Athletes and Racial Inequalities in N.C.A.A. Division I College Sports," Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania, Center for the Study of Race and Equity in Education, 2013.

³⁸ Richard, interview.

³⁹ Two institutions, UCLA and USC, included in this study outsourced game production responsibilities to companies outside the university rather than using a university employee for game direction responsibilities.

⁴⁰ Jason Dennard, interview by author, September 12, 2013, Florida State University.

arm-in-arm and swaying together to create the impression of a sawing motion while singing “Saw varsity’s horns off” at Texas A&M.⁴¹

Recalling McLeod’s metaphorical description of the sport—football “recreates the ideology and tactics of European colonial expansion”—such performances of marching bands transform the mostly black athletes on the field into tools of martial conquest that wage war against the opposition for the entertainment of the white tailgaters in the stands. In this way, marching bands contribute a sonic element to college football that fulfills the motivations of nineteenth-century European men’s sports, described by Varda Burstyn as “the need for an arena in which to practice and display unmistakably ‘manly’ qualities, and for the communal validation (religious worship) of these qualities within the larger culture.”⁴² As I have described elsewhere, the marching band’s militaristic nature aligned well with the new, violent sport of college football when the game was established during the years following the US Civil War.⁴³ In his recent dissertation, Joshua Gailey further describes the development of the school-band industry in the United States over the first half of the twentieth century as an industry established on the presupposition of the white, masculine values shared by many aspects of society at the time.⁴⁴ Gailey argues that while “women’s bands or black bands or Native American bands” certainly existed, the “industry that was assembled to support, perpetuate, and profit from the school band was never built to foster (or in many ways, even to recognize) them.”⁴⁵ He summarizes the push to institutionalize the band during this period as being “motivated by commercial interests that both exploited and reinforced structural inequalities.”⁴⁶ In the present, marching bands sit among the crowd as both elements of pageantry and as bastions of tradition, perpetuating cultural elements established during the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries when the sport was whiter, both demographically and culturally.

To be clear, marching bands are not inherently symbolic of white supremacy. After all, as Gailey indicates, countless cultural institutions simply perpetuated the status quo from their timeframe. Nevertheless, in the current construction of college football’s soundscape, which includes the various aspects of musical segregation described in the previous sections above, marching bands contribute to the perpetuation of a predominantly white culture and to the suppression and isolation of black culture to remote periods of the game’s soundscape. Table 4 shows the predominantly white soundtrack that marching bands perpetuate in a single case study by outlining every non-school-specific musical selection performed by the Baylor

⁴¹ For an example of this practice, see chriskent2011, “Aggie War Hymn- Saw varsity’s Horns Off- Student View,” YouTube video, <https://web.archive.org/web/20200429192456/https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nk3jP6FKFVo>.

⁴² Vardy Burstyn, *The Rites of Men: Manhood, Politics, and the Culture of Sport* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1999), 64.

⁴³ John Michael McCluskey, “Music as Narrative in American College Football” (PhD diss., University of Kentucky, 2016). In particular, see “First Quarter: The Historical Development and Modern Implementation of Musical narrative in American College Football,” 35–66.

⁴⁴ Joshua Gailey, “Beginning Bands: Progressive Reform and Birth of the American School-Band Industry, 1907–1940” (PhD diss., Yale University, 2019).

⁴⁵ Gailey, “Beginning Bands,” 181.

⁴⁶ Gailey, “Beginning Bands,” 189.

Table 4. Baylor University Marching Band Arrangements Performed on November 7, 2013.

Selection	Performer/Composer
Theme Song from <i>Dudley Do-Right</i> (1961–70)	Fred Steiner
"Imperial March" from <i>Star Wars</i> (1977)	John Williams
"Rock and Roll, Part 2" ("Hey Song") (1972)	Gary Glitter
Theme from <i>Man of Steel</i> (2013)	Hans Zimmer
"Seven Nation Army" (2003)	White Stripes
"Can't Hold Us" (2011)	Macklemore and Ryan Lewis
"Gospel" from <i>Monsters University</i> (2013)	MarchFourth Marching Band
"Frankenstein" (1973)	Edgar Winter Group
"Life is a Highway" (1991)	Tom Cochrane
"Tennessee Waltz" (1948)	Patti Page (Lyrics: Redd Stewart; Music: Pee Wee King)

University marching band in its game against the University of Oklahoma on November 7, 2013, excepting the selections included in its patriotic halftime show. Although the band did perform several different genres—incorporating a substantial amount of US popular and cinematic music into their repertoire—every selection is originally by white performers/composers, chosen specifically to please a predominantly white audience.

Band arrangements of rock or heavy metal "evoke power and intensity" in the same ways that Robert Walser describes in heavy metal, including elements such as power chords.⁴⁷ Additionally, each of the cinematic selections the band performed are taken from films whose protagonists are white, including the indestructible Superman, the savior of the galaxy, Luke Skywalker from *Star Wars* (1977), and the brave cartoon Mountie, Dudley Do-Right. The protagonists from the animated film *Monsters University* (2013) are non-human, but they are voiced by two white actors, John Goodman and Billy Crystal. For these soundtracks, the musical and harmonic language of these films is decidedly in the traditions of Western classical music or cartoon parodies of that style, further positioning the game's soundscape as a predominantly white one, despite the demographics of the athletes playing the sport.

Whereas the ensemble's history is a contributing factor here, I argue that it is more so its repertoire amidst the other devices in play within a stadium that solidifies its role in musical segregation. Marching bands perform fight songs, movie themes, and arrangements of rock and heavy metal selections in much larger quantities than all other musical styles, and, when this repertoire blends with the strategies utilized by the other music coordinators in a stadium, college football stadiums across the nation maintain and celebrate a culture of whiteness, every Saturday of the fall.

⁴⁷ For more on the sonic qualities and elements of power present in heavy metal, see chapter 2 ("Beyond the Vocals: Toward the Analysis of Popular Musical Discourses") of Robert Walser's *Running with the Devil: Power Gender and Madness in Heavy Metal Music* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 1993).

Moving Forward

It is worth taking a moment to recognize some steps towards “integration” in stadium programming, as music coordinators are diversifying the musical genres used in stadiums across the country. Heavy metal and rock selections, of course, still dramatically outnumber other genres, but new musical selections by more varied types of commercial performers seem to be increasingly included in college football’s soundtrack. As one example, in 2013 the University of Tennessee began using Lil Jon’s “Turn Down for What” to prompt crowd noise before defensive third downs. The crowd parodied Lil Jon’s original chorus by singing “*third down* for what.” By all accounts, Tennessee’s audience received this practice remarkably well, and it continued for several seasons before falling out of practice.

Additionally, marching bands are implementing an increasing number of selections or arrangements from Historically Black College and University (HBCU) band traditions. There is a dearth of research on the musical practices of HBCU marching bands, thus, the specific history behind these examples has yet to be written. However, arrangements of selections such as “Talkin’ Out the Side of Your Neck” by Cameo (1984) have circulated for years in HBCU repertoires and are now being heard in mainstream football stadiums nationwide. This selection was heard at five regionally varied games out of the sixteen included in this case study, including the University of Miami, Florida State University, Ohio State University, the University of Texas at Austin, and the University of Kentucky. Additionally, North Carolina A&T, an HBCU, debuted a band arrangement of the Gregory Brother’s “Bed Intruder Song” (2010), an auto-tuned composition based on a television interview from Huntsville, Alabama that went viral online.⁴⁸ Various versions of this arrangement have since been incorporated into the band repertoires at Ohio State, Florida State, and Western Michigan University, and performances of each of these can be readily found on YouTube.⁴⁹ While such steps suggest that integration in college football is ongoing, the college sport remains disproportionately white in its audience and traditions. The sport’s cultural/audible diversification may well be occurring at a superficial level, with these repertoire changes connecting the sport to popular (and viral) culture while still maintaining

⁴⁸ Auto-tune is a means of digitally altering pitch. While it was originally devised as a means of correcting pitch inaccuracies, it has since also become an aesthetic device used by many artists for the distinct synthesized vocal effect it can create. The rapper T-Pain is particularly known for his extensive use of auto-tune, and numerous other examples can be found throughout modern popular music.

⁴⁹ For the Gregory Brothers’ original song, see Gregory Brothers, “Bed Intruder Song!!!,” YouTube video, <http://web.archive.org/web/20191104120043/https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hMtZfW2z9dw>. For North Carolina A&T’s performance, see Thomas L. Jones Jr., “NC A&T—Bed Intruder Song 8.11.2010,” YouTube video, <http://web.archive.org/web/20191005131853/https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Q3UsvLyu3N0>. For Ohio State’s performance, see GC Baritone, “The Bed Intruder Song (the Ohio State Marching Band Baritone Section),” YouTube video, https://web.archive.org/web/20200429191804/https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fxDzyEeN_c4. For Florida State University’s performance, see Marcus Hanna, “FSU Band—Bed Intruder Song,” YouTube video, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Pw2gmn7MIQ>. For Western Michigan University’s performance, see Casey Spring, “Bed Intruder Song—Western Michigan University Bronco Marching Band 2010,” YouTube video, <http://web.archive.org/web/20200429201406/https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IhIG9-5akAI>.

the traditional tentpoles of college football’s pageantry. More time and observation will be necessary to observe the extent of these changes.

To that end, college football’s cultural integration is progressing at an astonishingly slow pace, compared to other levels of American popular sports. Although the National Basketball Association (NBA) and Major League Baseball (MLB) are not perfect in this regard (indeed, a quick glance at the owners’ suites will offer quick evidence to this end), they seem to be more culturally integrated than football. Musically speaking, the NBA does not shy away from associations with hip-hop culture, which frequently sounds during games and advertisements. Indeed, Ken McLeod has described the cultural alignment between hip-hop and the NBA as deriving from their shared urban settings.⁵⁰ Players in the MLB typically get to choose the musical selections that play over their stadium’s PA system as they approach home plate to bat, a sort of auto-soundtracking process. Matthew Mihalka described the process of choosing these “walk-up” songs, stating that “many players approach the selection of their entrance music quite seriously, putting forth a great deal of research before selecting a song,” which can include markers that “signify a player’s race or ethnic background.”⁵¹ Whereas there are some restraints regarding such selections, particularly regarding obscenities, players are able generally to choose pieces from any variety of styles, regardless of what the audience may prefer.

Ultimately, and perhaps surprisingly, players have the most agency to integrate college football culture. Rhoden argues that integration alone “did not mean the transfer of power from whites to blacks any more than the black workforce in the cotton fields threatened white control of antebellum plantations.”⁵² As such, black athletes have generated a “fighting spirit” to foster social change throughout US history. Rhoden describes this legacy among professional athletes:

Black athletic culture, like the rest of African American culture, evolved under the pressure of oppression. At every stage, that oppression—from slavery to segregation—has been struggled against, and in some cases vanquished. But at every turn, lessons were learned, weapons formed, a legacy created. Black athletes have historically struggled against the great problems of American life—in fact, the great problems facing humanity. They have fought dehumanization, an unfair playing field, economic exploitation, and inequalities in power. The legacy of black athletic culture is a fighting spirit, as embodied in fiery characters from Jack Johnson to Curt Flood. The legacy of the black athlete is an elegant style, developed by physical artists from Willie Mays to Allen Iverson, as a way of showcasing the humanity, creativity, and improvisatory spirit of its practitioners. And the legacy of the black athlete is an acceptance of a larger mission, as displayed by Muhammad Ali’s stands of conscience, Tommie Smith’s raised fist, or Rube Foster’s goal of creating and economically viable, independent black baseball league. Each of these legacies was initiated and refined as a response to a specific historical barrier, but the responsibility of black athletes today—and of all of us, really—is to understand how those legacies can also shape the future.⁵³

⁵⁰ McLeod, *We Are the Champions*, 80. McLeod also describes the NBA’s recent efforts to diversify their audiences by playing “a variety of musical styles” aside from hip-hop.

⁵¹ Matthew Mihalka, “From the Hammond Organ to ‘Sweet Caroline’: The Historical Evolution of Baseball’s Sonic Environment” (PhD diss., University of Minnesota, 2012), 179–80.

⁵² Rhoden, *Forty Million Dollar Slaves*, 139.

⁵³ Rhoden, *Forty Million Dollar Slaves*, 6–7.

This legacy of a fighting spirit, although it seemed to lay dormant for a time—Rhoden laments Michael Jordan's neutrality in many social issues of the 1990s⁵⁴—is showing signs of returning to life, particularly on college campuses.

In November 2015, a group of black players on the University of Missouri football team joined a larger protest by a black student organization, the Legion of Black Collegians. Incensed by the lack of action from the university president, Tim Wolfe, after a series of race-related incidents on campus, the players agreed to boycott all football-related activities until Wolfe resigned.⁵⁵ Before the football players joined the protests, Wolfe had little incentive to listen to the protestors—although one graduate student demanding Wolfe's resignation was several days into a hunger strike. Once the football players joined the protest, the university had real financial liabilities to consider. If Missouri forfeited its next game, scheduled against Brigham Young University, the school would be liable for one million dollars of damages—a little more than double Wolfe's annual salary—to be paid to Brigham Young no later than thirty days following the cancelled game.⁵⁶ With the added financial pressure, Wolfe resigned roughly one day after the players joined the protests. The effectiveness of these students bonding together demonstrates how much agency black athletes wield when they act as a unit.

In 2016, professional football players found a similar voice in Colin Kaepernick, whose protests swept through the NFL as he and other players responded to systematic police brutality against black Americans.⁵⁷ The players' primary act of protesting was taking a knee rather than standing during the patriotic pregame ritual of the national anthem, and the vast majority of the protestors were black athletes.⁵⁸ The protests extended to collegiate sports as well, with student athletes from various sports adopting Kaepernick's iconic protest posture.⁵⁹ That athletes demonstrated during the national anthem in particular drew a substantial amount of attention

⁵⁴ See "The River Jordan: The Dilemma of Neutrality" in Rhoden, *Forty Million Dollar Slaves*, 196–217.

⁵⁵ "Black Mizzou Players Say They'll Strike until President Tim Wolfe Resigns," ESPN, November 7, 2015, https://web.archive.org/web/20200308222420/https://www.espn.com/college-football/story/_/id/14078494/missouri-tigers-football-players-strike-embattled-tim-wolfe-resigns.

⁵⁶ Adrienne Green, "The Financial Calculations: Why Tim Wolfe Had to Resign," *The Atlantic*, November 9, 2015, <https://web.archive.org/web/20190713121053/https://www.theatlantic.com/business/archive/2015/11/mizzou-tim-wolfe-resignation/414987/>.

⁵⁷ Steve Wyche, "Colin Kaepernick Explains Why He Sat during National Anthem," NFL, August 27, 2016, <http://web.archive.org/web/20200201095342/http://www.nfl.com/news/story/0ap300000691077/article/colin-kaepernick-explains-why-he-sat-during-national-anthem>.

⁵⁸ In addition to race, the anthem protests and the responses to them were closely tied to constructions of masculinity and nationalism built on the legacies of militarism. See my discussion on these issues in John Michael McCluskey, "'Rough! Tough! Real Stuff!': Music, Militarism, and Masculinity in American College Football," *American Music* 37, no. 1 (Spring 2019): 50–52.

⁵⁹ For instance, volleyball players at West Virginia Tech knelt during the national anthem in early September 2016. See Kaela Gunderson and Jarrod Clay, "West Virginia Tech Volleyball Players Kneel During National Anthem," WCHS, September 7, 2016, <https://web.archive.org/web/20160909160310/http://wchstv.com/news/local/west-virginia-tech-volleyball-players-kneel-during-national-anthem>. Additionally, basketball players at Ole Miss took a knee in February 2019 in response to two pro-Confederacy rallies in Oxford, Mississippi. See "Eight Ole Miss Players Kneel During Anthem in Response to Confederacy Rally," ESPN, February 23, 2019, https://web.archive.org/web/20190227210732/https://www.espn.com/mens-college-basketball/story/_/id/26063456/eight-ole-miss-players-kneel-anthem-response-confederacy-rally.

in the forms of both support and ire. A particularly common criticism of the protestors was that their protests were disrespectful to the US military and veterans.⁶⁰ Perhaps the most famous objection to the anthem protests came from President Donald Trump, who declared at a rally in Huntsville, Alabama in September 2017, "Wouldn't you love to see one of these NFL owners, when somebody disrespects our flag, to say, 'get that son of a bitch off the field.?'"⁶¹ The next day, Trump reiterated his belief that protesting players should be fired.⁶² College football avoided much of this controversy as college players are not typically on the football field during the national anthem. However, a number of anthem protests still occurred at college football games over the seasons since the protests began, including at the college football championship game in January 2020.⁶³ During this game's pregame festivities, the NCAA sought to recognize State Teachers of the Year from across the country. These teachers were still on the field for the national anthem performance, and one of these honorees, Kelly Holstine, knelt during the anthem "to stand up for marginalized and oppressed people."⁶⁴ Clearly, football's participants, including both players and other contributors, use their platform to assert Rhoden's fighting spirit and attempt to foster social change.

Race is not the only means of critically understanding the soundscapes of college football stadiums. There are certainly other themes—such as gender, violence, militarism, and religion, among others—that have been explored in other writings and warrant further research.⁶⁵ However, this analysis of college football stadium soundscapes demonstrates that race's role is central to understanding representation

⁶⁰ Kaepernick and other protestors took active steps to avoid this interpretation, but it became a major talking point regardless. Eric Reid, one of Kaepernick's teammates at the beginning of the protests, penned an editorial for the *New York Times* in September 2017. The article specifically responds to the anti-military critique. See "Eric Reid: Why Colin Kaepernick and I Decided to Take a Knee," *New York Times*, September 25, 2017, <http://web.archive.org/web/20180817194001/https://www.nytimes.com/2017/09/25/opinion/colin-kaepernick-football-protests.html>.

⁶¹ "President Trump Remarks at Senator Strange Campaign Rally," C-SPAN, September 22, 2017, <http://web.archive.org/web/20171016143116/https://www.c-span.org/video/?434480-1/president-trump-campaigns-alabama-senator-luther-strange>.

⁶² "Trump to Hannity: NFL Players 'Cannot Disrespect our Country, Our Flag, or Our Anthem,'" Fox News Insider, October 11, 2017, <http://web.archive.org/web/20190812024000/http://insider.fox-news.com/2017/10/11/trump-sits-down-hannity-9pm-et-nfl-cannot-disrespect-our-country>.

⁶³ Examples of anthem protests in college football include players at the University of Michigan and Michigan State University raising their fists in protest during the anthem in September 2016. Also, nineteen members of Eastern Carolina University's marching band knelt while performing the national anthem in October 2016. For more information, see "Michigan, Michigan State Players Raise Fists During National Anthem," ESPN, September 24, 2016, http://web.archive.org/web/20160927041643/https://www.espn.com/college-football/story/_/id/17626402/college-football-players-protest-anthem. See also "ECU Chancellor, Gov. McCrory Speak Out About Band Members Kneeling," WITN, October 6, 2016, <http://web.archive.org/web/20161008104236/https://www.witn.com/content/news/395523401.html>.

⁶⁴ Ella Torres, "Teacher of the Year' Kneels during Anthem at College Football Championship Attended by Trump," ABC News, January 16, 2020, <https://web.archive.org/web/20200119171409/https://abcnews.go.com/Politics/teacher-year-kneels-anthem-college-football-championship-attended/story?id=68326303>.

⁶⁵ For example, see Eduardo Herrera, "Masculinity, Violence, and Deindividuation in Argentine Soccer Chants: The Sonic Pitfalls of Participatory Sounding-in-Synchrony," *Ethnomusicology* 62, No. 3 (Fall 2018): 470–99. See also Ken McLeod, "The Construction of Masculinity in African American Music and Sports," *American Music* 27, no. 2 (Summer 2009): 204–26.

and presentation within college football culture, which largely remains a celebration of whiteness. While there are signs indicating that college football culture's integrative process is ongoing, the continued presence of musical segregation and its various motivations illustrates that there is still work to be done. To put it another way, George Wallace called for "Segregation Forever" in 1963, and college football's soundscape is one example that his dream for the future has not yet been proven wrong.

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