Slayer, and the Godfather of Speed Metal

MIGOS, The Beatles, and Stevie: Wonder How They’re Related?

Hip-Hop’s Role Today: Carraway Weighs in on 2017’s Latest Releases

The Velvet Underground: Leaders of a Sonic Revolution

Disco Demolition Night: White Romanticism of the 1960s and the Culmination of Racially Charged Anxiety Against a Genre
TABLE OF CONTENTS

Page 3 - “Yellow Submarine: An Expression of the Sixties” 
BY EMMA GREENFIELD

Page 5 - “The Velvet Underground: Influence of a Revolution” 
BY ADAM SIEGEL

Page 7 - “Queen: The Rock Band of the 1970s” 
BY WILL HEIN

Page 9 - “The Demise of Disco” 
BY ERIC ZEPEDA

Page 11 - “The Godfather of Speed Metal” 
BY DYLAN MILLHOUSE

Page 13 - “From the Cocoon to Kung Fu: Kendrick Lamar’s Development and Influence Over the Years” 
BY JACK GINSBERG

Page 15 - “The Evolution of MTV” 
BY SARAH KUHN

Page 17 - “Stevie” 
BY GRANT VAN INWEGEN

Page 19 - “Why Hip-Hop?” 
BY JULIAN CAREW

Page 21 - “Rap’s #1 Family” 
BY COLLIN ANDREWS
Throughout their career, The Beatles continuously put themselves into film. They released their first movie, A Hard Day’s Night, in July of 1964 and their final movie, Let It Be, in May 1970, a month after the band broke up. All of their movies are live action, featuring The Beatles themselves, the exception being Yellow Submarine.

The film, released in the United Kingdom in July 1968, is an animated adventure featuring The Beatles’ quest to save an underwater paradise, Pepperland. Pepperland is attacked by Blue Meanies who freeze its citizens, and The Beatles are called on to save the town. The movie features their difficulties while traveling to Pepperland from Liverpool in the Yellow Submarine. Once reaching Pepperland, they use music to unfreeze everyone.

Beatles songs are played throughout the movie, and most of the scenes are clearly inspired by certain songs. Despite being a large part of their previous movies, the Beatles themselves were hardly involved in the production of the film. They did not give instructions regarding the plot, and they did not even voice themselves. It was the first film in which The Beatles themselves did not actually star. They directed their previous movie, Magical Mystery Tour, so it’s interesting that they completely relinquished the reigns so soon after having total control. That being said, Magical Mystery Tour was the last movie that they seemed to have direct involvement in. Since The Beatles played such a small role in the development of Yellow Submarine, the movie cannot be viewed as a direct display of their own thoughts and beliefs. This absence prevents the viewer from assuming that everything presented in the film came from the band’s own imagination. While the film does not allow for a peek into The Beatles’ minds, it allows the viewer to see how fans viewed the band. The production team consisted of people who experienced the sixties, and they created the movie with their own idea of what The Beatles and their music represented. While the movie may not accurately represent what the band believed, it is a good representation of how people saw the band.

The film is psychedelic, filled with bright, flashing colors and moving patterns. The filmmakers experiment by combining real-life pictures with animations, like in the tour of England during “Eleanor Rigby.” The mix of reality and hallucinations pulls the viewer into the world of drugs, just as The Beatles’ then most recent album, Sgt. Pepper’s Lonely Hearts Club Band had; the style of the movie stays true to at least part of the band’s message of the time.

The plot maintains many ideals of the late sixties. It was the age of hippies and the peak of anti-Vietnam War protests; music was seen as a solution, a way of bringing people together. In the film, Pepperland is plagued by a war, and The Beatles save the day with their tunes. In the scene for “All You Need is Love,” John runs around huge block letters that spell out “LOVE” – the “peace and love” message of the sixties is clearly showcased. The Beatles played their final live concert in August 1966, and so they were unable to participate in the music festivals during the end of the decade. In a sense, Yellow Submarine was a way for The Beatles to participate and give their audience a performance.

The soundtrack, however, clearly displays The Beatles’ absence from the production, as only four of the songs were new releases and none of them were written for the movie. “Hey Bulldog,” “All Together Now,” “Only A Northern Song,” and “It’s All Too Much” were all pre-recorded but not chosen to be on any of the band’s albums. The rest of the songs were either on Revolver, Sgt. Pepper’s Lonely Hearts Club Band, Rubber Soul, or released earlier as singles.

It is hard to say if a song fits into the movie or not because so much of the plot was inspired by the music. For example, the whole character of the Nowhere Man was inspired by the song. A lot of the songs, like “Lucy In The Sky With Diamonds,” get whole scenes depicting the lyrics. Arguably, seven of the eleven reused songs clearly inspired certain scenes that made some sense in the larger context of the movie. On the other hand, only two of the four songs released for the movie had scenes devoted to them, and only the scene for “Hey Bulldog” went with the rest of the plot. The fact that a bigger percentage of the re-released songs actually contributed to the plot than the new releases suggests that the filmmakers were more inspired by The Beatles’ previous songs; they liked the songs that were presented to the world and enjoyed by the band’s audience, not the ones that were rejected by the band.

Ultimately, the movie got mixed reviews. Critics thought it was an unremarkable film, though some thought it had more redeeming qualities than others. Miller Francis, in an early 1969 article for Great Speckled Bird, expresses the opinion that the film was a poor representation of The Beatles, inadequately showing what the band meant to the people of the sixties. He argues that the filmmakers took the songs at face-value, keeping them lighthearted and not at all delving into their deeper meanings. On the other hand, in a New York Times article, Renata Adler expressed her feeling that the movie simply makes the viewer happy. It is filled with strange images and amusing puns. Her review suggests that perhaps Yellow Submarine was not meant to be a good movie, it was meant to bring joy.

Yellow Submarine is clearly distinct from The Beatles’ past films, as the band had little input. The movie may not encompass all of the band’s strong beliefs, but by remaining lighthearted, it is inclusive for people of all ages. By having outsiders control the entire film, it became a way of seeing how the people viewed The Beatles, not how The Beatles viewed themselves.
Influence of a Revolution

The Velvet Underground:

by Adam Siegel

Its musical roots to The Velvet Underground. Not Reed’s native New York at CBGB’s owes its all of the flourishing punk scene that bloomed in Lou after the band, especially in punk. Had The Velvet Underground not done it first, the angry and protective songs of Sex Pistols or The Clash may never have come into existence.

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The first innovation of The Velvet Underground that jumps out is the reality of their music. Yes, their lyrics were incredibly vulgar for the time, an openly depicted sex and drug abuse. However, the point was not to be inappropriate for the sake of being inappropriate. Their songs depicted what they really saw and experienced in New York nightlife, and delved into the causations and motivations of people’s lives. Not everyone lived the charmed life that rock had previously depicted: a fun, carefree extravaganza of cars, sex, and love. People really did live completely different lives on the fringe, and The Velvet Underground did their best to express this to the rest of the world.

They admittedly did not care about commercial performance, and showed this. For example, titling a song “Heroin” is guaranteeing that it will not be heard in public. The point of this song is not simply to be unconventional, it is also to analyze why somebody would do heroin and “nullify their life.” This willingness to say whatever you want obviously has infinite examples of influence, as lyric freedom has only increased over time. However, direct effects can be seen in rock movements soon after the band, especially in punk. Had The Velvet Underground not done it first, the angry and protective songs of Sex Pistols or The Clash may never have come into existence.

The flourishing punk scene that bloomed in Lou Reed’s native New York at CBGB’s owes its all of its musical roots to The Velvet Underground. Not only did the band open the doors to more lyric experimentation, they also pioneered the simple musical style of the punk era. In “Heroin”, for example, the guitarist only plays two chords the entire song. The Velvet Underground had a “deceptive simplicity of songs: a handful of notes and indelible riffs as a foundation for stories”. This style went on to become an essential characteristic of punk rock, a rock and roll style that was more about an angry message than it was about musical complexity.

Aside from their musical style, The Velvet Underground also had a particular aesthetic that set a trend for future rock acts to follow. The band chose not to conform to the matching uniform theme of 1960’s rock bands like the Beatles. This seems on the surface like an insignificant change. However, wearing whatever they wanted and not matching were precursors that led to the flashy and ridiculous outfits of the 1970’s and 1980’s. Without the simple leather and t-shirts of The Velvet Underground, there never would have been the spiky hair and combat boots of the Sex Pistols and The Clash. In addition, the original stray from the archetypal rock band led to the innovations of Rock that occurred during the glam era, such as more extravagant live shows and flamboyant musical alter-egos. The Velvet Underground also broke the typical band structure by adding the talents of John Cale. A talented multi-instrumentalist, Cale added a new and unusual aspect to their sound, often heard playing the viola on their tracks. This was a first step in the eventual abandonment of the classic drummer, rhythm guitar, lead guitar, and bass structure. This allowed for future bands to choose their own individual sound by customizing the instruments in their band.

Brian Eno once said, talking about the fact that The Velvet Underground’s first album only sold 30,000 copies, that “everyone who bought one of those 30,000 copies started a band.” While this is clearly an exaggeration, the influence of the band on later generations of Rock can’t be overstated. By opening their lyrics to underbelly reality, they allowed for more freedom in mainstream lyrics. By creating a beautifully simple sound, they opened the door for fringe rock groups during the punk era to develop their own sound. By creating a new image, they started the trend toward showmanship and glam in the 1970’s and 1980’s.
Queen: The Rock Band of the 1970s

By Will Hein

Over the past five decades, British group Queen has provided the world with some of the most commercially successful and recognizable songs. From the sports anthems of “We Will Rock You” and “We Are the Champions” to love ballads like “Somebody to Love” and epics like “Bohemian Rhapsody,” Queen pushed the generic boundaries of rock’n’roll while selling 80 million albums worldwide in their first 20 years together (Sutcliffe)! While many know the songs, lesser known is the story of Queen’s early years, when their style and sound first came together over the decade of the 1970s.

Since their formation in 1970, Queen has always been an unconventional and eclectic group of musicians. Guitarist Brian May and drummer Roger Taylor met as bandmates at Imperial College London, forming the rock band Smile in 1968. May, who was working towards his B.S. in physics, and Taylor, a former dentist, were joined by Persian immigrant and design student Freddie Mercury (born Farrokh Bulsara) when Smile’s lead singer left in 1970. Finally, bassist and science student John Deacon joined, and Queen was born. If the bandmates’ backgrounds were different, then their personalities were even more divergent. May was a manic depressive, known for serious mood swings. While more upbeat, Deacon was the most stable of the group and kept to himself. Roger Taylor was famous for using drugs and having sex between tours. His hobbies notes, it is “just so well defined” (Wilde). Mercury was known for using drugs and having sex between tours. His hobbies notes, it is “just so well defined” (Wilde). Mercury was famous for using drugs and having sex between tours. His hobbies notes, it is “just so well defined” (Wilde).

The group’s frontman and largest personality, pushing the group’s flamboyance and party-hard mentality. Even before Queen made it big, Freddie believed he was destined for greatness and was known to say things like “I’m not going to be a star …. I’m going to be a legend” (Wilde). Despite Mercury’s optimism, Queen did not immediately find success. Working tirelessly on demos, Mercury did not immediately find success. Working tirelessly on demos, Queen were signed by EMI in 1973 and released their debut, self-titled album the same year. While it contained songs that would later become Queen classics — like “Keep Yourself Alive” and “Seven Seas of Rhye” — critics had a hard time categorizing Queen. Mercury’s flamboyant outfits and performances echoed the contemporary work of glam rocker David Bowie, May’s hard rock guitar style resembled that used by Deep Purple, and the fantastical, storytelling lyrics seemed influenced by progressive rockers like Yes (Wilde). Yet, May claims that despite their different backgrounds and tastes, Queen agreed on a musical aesthetic for the band, as he says, “this big, heavy emotional wave of sound with strong melodies and harmonies…. heavy plus glamour” (Sutcliffe). With the hindsight of history, the album Queen was influenced by rock of the 1960s, but orchestrated by Brian May in a forward-looking, 1970s way that established Queen as a hard rockers with a melodic focus (Doherty).

The group’s next two studio albums—1974’s Queen II and Sheer Heart Attack—brought Queen their first chart success in the UK and an increased international audience (Doherty; Wilde). It wasn’t until 1975 that Queen truly began to take shape as the superstars of rock they are known as today, however. That year, Queen released their fourth album, A Night at the Opera and the album’s hit single: the unconventional, six-minute rock-operatic ballad “Bohemian Rhapsody.” Many consider the album to be Queen’s magnum opus, and it’s elaborate production epitomized the over-the-top nature that came to define Queen from this point forward. The most expensive rock album ever produced at the time, A Night at the Opera was recorded in six different studios and pushed contemporary technology to its limits. Bohemian Rhapsody alone took twelve hours a day over three weeks, with a whole week spent on the track’s 180-voice opera section (Wilde; Sutcliffe). The album was also Queen’s most experimental work to date, showcasing the range of the group’s songwriting: “Good Company” demonstrated May’s jazz-influence, “Sea and Rendezvous” showed Mercury’s music hall style, and Deacon’s “You’re My Best Friend” represented Queen at their poppy best (Sutcliffe). It was the breadth and energy of the album that made Queen more popular among the masses and, as rock journalist Harry Doherty writes, that “pulled them away from comparisons with heavy-metal giants, Led Zeppelin, and pushed them nearer to the Beatles.”

Yet, Queen continued to resemble Led Zeppelin in its embodiment of “sex, drugs, and rock’n’roll” and according to a former road manager, and even “took it up a number of notches” (Wilde). Mercury was famous for using drugs and having sex between shows. And offstage, he nearly made headlines with elaborate parties including his legendary 1979 birthday party, a five-day orgy with 100 friends flown in to New York on Concord. Moreover, Queen indulged in the 1970s hard rock trend of increasing the hedonism and scale of live shows (Charry, 71). At the same time, Queen did so in their own way, believing that their records and live shows be treated as separate entities, unlike other contemporary bands committed to exact recreations. Instead, Queen focused on theatricality to make up for limits of the four-man act live, like at a 1976 set at Edinburgh that used dry ice to create a haze and to help set a mood for the liveshow that could not be recreated by listening at home (Doherty).

Despite the overwhelming commercial success of Queen in 1975, some critics still bashed Queen, sceptical of their over-the-top performances. And just a year later, in 1976, punk rock took off with UK groups like the Sex Pistols, shifting the popular aesthetics of rock away from Queen’s complex harmonies and performances. Queen adapted to the times as they always did: in their own way. While doubling-down in its commitment to bombastic parties and performances, Queen’s 1977 album News of the World gave Queen their infamous “We Will Rock You” and “We Are the Champions” which spent six months on the US charts as the group’s first top-five billboard hit (Wilde).

Entering the 1980s, Queen was on top of the world, immensely popular among the three major music markets of the United States, the United Kingdom, and Japan. With the exception of their legendary 1985 performance at Live Aid, however, Queen had already seen their best days (Wilde). Personal issues increasingly weighed on the group and Mercury’s diagnosis of AIDS in 1987 put a stop to their touring.Yet, almost 50 years after Queen’s formation, their work over the 1970s remains just as much a part of popular culture as it did then because, as current lead singer Paul Rodgers notes, it is “just so well defined” (Wilde).
Disco Demolition Night was an event that occurred on July 12, 1979 at Comiskey Park in Chicago. It took place in between a baseball doubleheader and the utter chaos it created forfeited game two of this event. Over 50,000 disco discs were destroyed, 39 people arrested, and 15,000 gathered around the park after not being admitted because of the crowd. Beyond the sheer chaos it created, this event’s cultural significance speaks to the growing anti-disco sentiments that were brewing at the time. During this event, “regular ticket holders were denied admission” to the game because of the number of people who brought a disco record and were charged a promotional admissions fee of $0.98, which speaks to the sheer enthusiasm of this event and what it represented.

Beyond the sheer chaos it created, this event’s cultural significance speaks to the growing anti-disco sentiments that were brewing at the time. During this event, “regular ticket holders were denied admission” to the game because of the number of people who brought a disco record and were charged a promotional admissions fee of $0.98, which speaks to the sheer enthusiasm of this event and what it represented.

As Baraunstein wrote in 1998 for the Village Voice, “the real animosity between rock and disco lay in the position of the straight white male” where in the Rock world this subject was centralized and in the disco world he was “subject to a radical decentering” (Charruy, 76). This decentering can be seen through the values placed on music at the time and shows how exactly musical criticism was racialized at the time. While Rock music had increasingly fragmented in the 1970s “the memory of rock as a seriously political art form continued to inform the aesthetics of music audiences” (Frank, 283). As such, audiences appreciated music as “listeners” who took into account the music’s virtuosity as opposed to appreciating it through dancing. Disco turned this idea on its ahead, and the articulation of appreciation through performance, dance, coincided with a changing social atmosphere for LGBT Americans. Disco music “deemphasized live bands and shifted energies “from the stage to the dance floor” (Charruy, 76). Whereas musicians took the center stage in rock music under Disco this musicianship was replaced “by the anonymous production of sound and the physical coordination and rhythm that disco dancing required” (Frank, 291). Moreover, this reversal coincided with the social changes that were spearheaded by the Gay Liberation Movement of the 1960s that led “to an increased sense of freedom among gay men and allowed for public affirmations of their identities” (Frank, 284).

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As Disco achieved more mainstream success DJs began to incorporate disco into their rotations to remain relevant. Steve Dahl, a Chicago DJ who refused to embrace this change, was fired from his job and became increasingly embittered towards Disco music. Following this firing, he would “lip the word disco” as a DJ on rock station WLUP and through this liping would “signal the genre’s gay associations” (Frank, 299). In a television interview where he “appeared dressed in military fatigues and an army helmet” Dahl stated that he had a problem with “[Disco] culture, not the music” (Dahl, 301). The juxtaposition of his highly masculine outfit and the gay associations he made with disco music signaled that his problem with disco culture was its sexuality, gendered nature and cosmopolitan sensibility. By the end of the 70s, the anti-disco backlash coincided alongside “a rising right-wing antigay, anti-elitist, and anti-sexual” political movement (Frank, 306). While disco music had gained widespread popularity throughout the 70s, Disco Demolition Night represented a violent backlash. Because Disco Demolition Night was orchestrated by Dahl and because he conflated disco with homosexuality, this event was essentially a “giant coded gay bashing” that uncovered a homophobic America and sanctioned this event as patriotic by taking place within a baseball stadium (Braunstein, 4). Beyond the homophobia that Demolition Disco Night uncovered, it also reminds us how no genre of music or form of music criticism can be separated from one’s own identity or the beliefs to which one subscribes. Rather than just disliking a genre music, one should follow up asking themselves how they might be socialized to like/dislike any particular music genre.
The term “heavy metal” refers to a genre of music which either outrages or excites those who are familiar with its sound. Characterized by screeching guitar solos, ear-popping double bass, and negatively charged, violent lyrics, heavy metal is not and never has been for the faint of heart. Taking most of its influence from 60s rock, bands like Led Zeppelin and Black Sabbath paved the way for what mainstream metal was perpetuating, they eventually were compelled to cement them forever in heavy metal history.

Dave Lombardo decided to create their own group, Jeff Hannenman, Kerry King, Tom Araya, and Tom Araya, with Araya and Lombardo playing faster and harder, and they wanted to put on a spectacle that would elicit rage, energy, and excitement. Their first single, “Black Magic,” was written in ’83, and was Slayer’s introduction into the thrash metal world. Not long after, their first LP, Show no Mercy, was recorded in the same year. Following the release of these songs, Slayer began to steal the heavy metal show (Encyclopaedia Metallum). The next decade would see them release three studio albums, all of which garnered significant popularity and success. Among the LPs they released, however, none was more important and more controversial than the outrageous Reign in Blood.

Highlighted by songs such as “Raining Blood” and “Angel of Death,” Reign in Blood provided some of the band’s most satanic, violent, and disturbing content. The songs depicted images of blood, gore, and even demonic imagery. “Angel of Death” even drew its inspiration from the experimentation of the deranged and psychotic Nazi Doctor Josef Mengele on prisoners at Auschwitz. This song in particular created problems for the band as their then-label, Columbia Records, asked that the track actually be removed from the album before its release. Refusing to do so, the band was allowed to take the album to Geffen Records, who then provided them the outlet for its distribution. The controversy that would ensue following its release included Slayer being condemned as fascist, Pro-Nazi sympathizers who were preaching a verbal reenactment of the Holocaust.

Despite the backlash from those who disagreed with its message, “Angel of Death’s” first live debut on Halloween of 1986 came in Slayer’s second encore of the night and solidified it forever as Slayer’s set-closer (Epstein). The high intensity riffs combined with the dark lyrics created an audible sensory overload which instantly made the track a thrash metal classic. While the argument still stands of whether Slayer was justified in creating such a track, the influence that this particular song had on heavy metal cannot be ignored.

While Slayer was revered for their contributions to the genre, they don’t deny their roots nor the influence of those who came before them. Iron Maiden and Judas Priest were among the most important bands that helped to form the sound that Slayer would come to be known for. The gory aesthetic and satanically charged themes were direct products of these British bands which can be seen in songs like Iron Maiden’s “Number of the Beast”. Everything from their outfits to their album covers took direct inspiration from the heavy metal scene that had already been developed, and Slayer just simply refined and elevated it. When we think about sophistication and elegance, Slayer or heavy metal for that matter are certainly not the first things that come to mind. However, no one can deny that what they did for heavy metal was anything but an incredible contribution. Slayer injected even more passion, speed, and aggression into the sound, truly giving fans of the genre an offer they couldn’t refuse.

While you may not like heavy metal, or agree with its overall message, there’s no denying the impact the genre has had on the history of music. And don’t forget, if you haven’t heard heavy metal before, it’s never too late to turn up those speakers, throw on some Slayer, and head bang to the most violent and sadistic pleasure you’ll ever experience.
Kendrick Lamar’s Development and Influence Over the Years

By Jack Ginsberg

“I’m willin’ to die for this sh*t / I done cried for this sh*t, might take a life for this sh*t / Put the bible down and go eye for an eye for this sh*t.”[i]

As Kendrick Lamar so bluntly puts it in the opening lines of Element on his fourth studio album DAMN., he is committed to the game as if it were his only child. With the lyrical genius of a Dylan-esque writer and the ability to trap as hard as Offset from Migos, Kendrick Lamar has solidified himself from Migos, Kendrick Lamar has solidified himself as Lamar (Compton Centennial High). He was top of the rap game / We was top of the world / He was top of the rap game / We was top of the block / So watch that black boy fly.”[v]

This commences a change in the tone of the song, as he has now provided examples of two people (The Game and Arron Afflalo) who have escaped the undertow of Compton life. But then, in the last verse, Kendrick provides the hope and inspiration needed to motivate the generation of today by saying, “I wasn’t jealous cause of the talents they got / I was terrified they’d be the last black boys to fly out of Compton / Thank God…”[vi]

The beauty of the culmination of this ballad is the “Thank God,” almost explicitly and certainly confirming that there will be more success for a community that has endured so much pain and hardship. Kendrick Lamar, just like legends such as Mahalia Jackson, Marvin Gaye, and Odetta, uses the lifeblood of culture to illustrate a message needed to be heard by many marginalized individuals today: success is possible. However, he also demonstrates something else that is necessary; he shows that people are allowed to feel the raw concoction of rotten emotions that flow through the body after years of anguish. Lamar’s brilliance is not just in his lyrics or his style, it is in his blood. Kendrick Lamar, the modern day preacher of his generation, following the blues, R&B, and gospel. Lamar has become the modern day preacher of his generation, following the techniques used by older black musicians to create new, innovative music that synthesizes bonds throughout the African American community.

Lamar’s debut studio album, good kid, m.A.A.d city, the song “Black Boy Fly” represents the morale-boosting needed to keep the spirits of people high. One such song was “Oh Freedom,” a song popularized by black spiritual singer Odetta. Joan Baez performed the song during the 1963 March on Washington, and its deeply direct lyrics resonated with many individuals who knew the significant repercussions that would occur if the civil rights movement did not prevail. As the first verse of the song states, “Oh freedom, oh freedom, oh freedom over me / And before I’d be a slave I’ll be buried in my grave / And go home to my Lord and be free.”[ii]

Although the civil rights movement undoubtedly created positive change, there has certainly been a recent stagnation of progress for African Americans, especially those living in confined inner cities throughout America. This anger can be appropriately heard on Kendrick’s critically acclaimed album To Pimp A Butterfly. On the track “Institutionalized,” Lamar says, “I’m trapped inside the ghetto and I ain’t proud to admit it / Institutionalized, I keep runnin’ back for a visit / Hol’ up, get it back / I said I’m trapped inside the ghetto and I ain’t proud to admit it / Institutionalized, I could still kill me a nigga, so what?”[iii]

The sheer frustration demonstrated by Lamar’s lyrics illustrate a larger trend: the growing anger and outrage felt by the African American population that has been consistently subjugated for the last 200+ years. Lamar has accurately reflected the feelings of many Americans and has fashioned the techniques used by older black musicians to create new, innovative music that synthesizes bonds throughout the African American community.

On Lamar’s debut studio album, good kid, m.A.A.d city, the song “Black Boy Fly” represents the feelings of so many kids felt trapped by their resource-deprived environments. Kendrick’s unique modus operandi allows for his self-deprecating manner to create a very real quality: something that leads the listener to trust Lamar. The song talks about the rise of future NBA star Arron Afflalo, a fellow Compton native who attended the same school as Lamar (Compton Centennial High). He begins by talking about his envy of Afflalo, as received all of the attention due to his athletic prowess. He continues, “It’s 2004 and I’m watchin’ him score 30 / Remember vividly how them victory points had hurt me / ’Cause every basket was a reaction or a reminder / That we was just moving backwards.”[iv]

Lamar’s poignant and honest statement about his lack of progress and motivation throughout high school is representative of the lives of millions of high schoolers across America, continually and perpetually stuck in the molasses of everyday life, repeatedly going through the motions without committing themselves to a specific task. Lamar references this by saying, “He had his back like a spinal, meanwhile / We singing the same old song spinning the vinyl / Eleven graders gone wrong / He focused on the NBA, we focused on some Patron.”[v]

A little while later, “Be honest, none of us knew of a record deal...A tall nigga hopped out with Jordans and a white tank top / He was top of the rap game / We was top of the block / So watch that black boy fly.”[vi]

The beauty of the culmination of this ballad is the “Thank God,” almost explicitly and certainly confirming that there will be more success for a community that has endured so much pain and hardship. Kendrick Lamar, just like legends such as Mahalia Jackson, Marvin Gaye, and Odetta, uses the lifeblood of culture to illustrate a message needed to be heard by many marginalized individuals today: success is possible. However, he also demonstrates something else that is necessary; he shows that people are allowed to feel the raw concoction of rotten emotions that flow through the body after years of anguish. Lamar’s brilliance is not just in his lyrics or his style, it is in his blood. Kendrick Lamar, the person, believes he is a vessel for the word of God, just as he says in “God.”

“Everything I do is to embrace y’all / Everything I write is a damn eight ball / Everything I touch is a damn gold mine / Everything I say is from an angel.”

From the Cocoon to Kung Fu: Kendrick Lamar’s Development and Influence Over the Years

By Jack Ginsberg

“I’m willin’ to die for this sh*t / I done cried for this sh*t, might take a life for this sh*t / Put the bible down and go eye for an eye for this sh*t.”[i]
The Evolution of MTV

By Sarah Kuhn

The cable network Music Television, more commonly known as MTV, rocked the world when it aired on August 1st, 1981. At 12:01 EST the words “ladies and gentlemen, rock and roll,” spoken by John Lack, were played over footage of the first space shuttle launch countdown of Columbia and the launch of Apollo 11. Shortly after, the first song played on MTV was “Video Killed the Radio Star” by The Buggles which started the beginning of music videos. The cable channel originated in Kansas City with only a few viewers at its launch, but shortly grew into a national network. MTV was created to be the first channel of only music, hence the title music television, and played a constant loop of music twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week. The transitions between songs were led by video jockeys, better known as VJs, that introduced the songs and occasionally gave their own commentaries. VJs would also conduct interviews and promote upcoming concerts using promotional videos supplied by record companies. The target demographic was originally young adults, those who listened to music more frequently than any other age group.

British musicians were the first to take advantage of this movement with creating music videos before American musicians came around to the idea. MTV played all sorts of music including heavy metal, classic rock, and even country. As time went on and music video budgets increased, artists started releasing dance videos with their own choreography and a more creative vision. Many artists owe their success to MTV by gaining recognition through their music videos being played for such a large audience. A few artists who gained fame through MTV include Madonna and Michael Jackson. They both used their dancing abilities to attract attention and entertain the audience when performing.

While Michael Jackson had tremendous success with his music videos being played on MTV, it was not an easy task. In the beginning, MTV did not play a lot of African American artists and when they did it was in the early hours of the morning. It was a noticeable issue where artists such as David Bowie took a stand and said something publicly. MTV executives state that the lack of black artists was because there were not a lot that fit the classic rock vibe that the channel was based on. They deny that racism was ever the reason for the “blackout” and that it was simply because they only played rock music. MTV had trouble convincing record labels to allocate funds towards music videos for the start of the channel. Michael Jackson was one of the few artists who did not hesitate to make a music video for his hit “Billie Jean” on his album Thriller in 1982. It took some convincing for MTV to play the video and Walter Yetnikoff the CBS Records Group President reportedly threatened to remove all videos from CBS if they did not play “Billie Jean.” It was the first black artist’s video to be played frequently and was the beginning of black artists seeing more airtime. MTV did not play black artists when they first started out but because of Michael Jackson other black artists were now given the opportunity to have their music streamed as well. Michael Jackson went on to make one of the most expensive music videos at the time costing $500,000. The music video, “Thriller,” changed the concept of music videos by increasing in length from a promotional video to a mini film of thirteen minutes. Music videos became more popularized and now a large part of the music industry instead of being solely for promotional purposes.

Another signature of MTV is the MTV Video Music Awards which premiered for the first time on September 14th, 1984 to honor the best music video of the year. More commonly known as the VMAs, the Video Music Awards once again challenged society and broke the norm of award shows. At the first show, it was no surprise that Michael Jackson won a few awards for “Thriller,” but Herbie Hancock, a progressive Jazz artist, was the real winner of the night. Madonna gave an iconic live performance of “Like a Virgin” that is still talked about today, and set the standard of outrageous moments during the VMAs. From the first year and every year that follows, the VMAs are unpredictable and always a show full of entertainment. The award trophy for MTV’s award show has been moon men since the 1984 show. The moon men are a tribute to MTV’s roots and the first image associated with the network. MTV made the discovery of music videos in America and changed the world of music forever while Neil Armstrong changed the entire world when he landed on the moon.

MTV changed directions in 1992 with the release of their first reality show The Real World. This was the beginning of a new era that shifted their focus entirely. With the debut of reality shows MTV began to stream music less realizing that shows had higher ratings. This led to more television shows and significantly fewer music videos being aired in more current years. While MTV has transformed since the 1980s it will always be known for starting the wave of music videos and helping launch numerous artists’ careers.
Stevland Hardaway Judkins was born in 1950 in Saginaw, Michigan. Prematurely born, he was put in an incubator with too high of an oxygen concentration that exacerbated his retinopathy of prematurity, leaving him blind. Rather than hurting him musically, blindness left little Stevie with an acute sense of sound. Using sound to stimulate his life, Stevie became a multi-instrumentalist as a child, quickly picking up drums, piano, and harmonica. His musical ability turned him into a star at his church and Berry Gordy signed him to a five-year contract under the Motown label. Gordy assigned Clarence Paul to work with Stevie to help him write songs and produce an album. Paul gave Stevie the stage name ‘Little Stevie Wonder.’ His first commercial success came in the form of a number one hit, “Fingertips Part 2” in the album 12-Year-Old Genius, which highlighted call and response and his musical ability turned him into a star at his

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to set up his own publishing company. In 1972, at his new studio, Wonder created Music of My Mind, which was a continuous artistic statement, identifiably different from the stream of singles in his previous albums. The album came out around the same time as his divorce with Syreeta Wright, and was filled with bittersweet love songs. Its sound was highlighted by the noticeable presence of synthesizers, which was influenced by his collaboration with engineers Bob Margouleff and Malcolm Cecil. While Music of My Mind didn’t have amazing commercial success, it attracted the attention of the Rolling Stones, who he later toured with, increasing his popularity with white audiences. Wonder’s next album, Talking Book, started the period from 1972-1976 where he was arguably the most dominant recording artist in the world. This album produced a number one hit, “Superstition,” which became an instant classic, driven by energetic and funky electronics. He also started incorporating his political views into his work for the first time since his “Blowin’ in the Wind” cover. “Big Brother” was the first of a few Wonder songs to take jabs at Richard Nixon. Talking Book brought Stevie Wonder to stardom, while his next album in 1973 cemented him as a superstar.

Innervisions, filled with social consciousness, won the Grammy Album of the Year. Wonder used this album to express his distrust and frustration with the political establishment through songs like “Living For the City,” which touches on the hardships of living in poor urban areas. Following the release of Innervisions, Stevie Wonder got into a car crash when tree branch fell on his car, leaving him in a coma for several days due to brain injury. In 1974, his album Fulfillingness’ First Finale hit number one on the pop charts. This album was noticeably more upbeat than his past work, including hits like “Boogie On” and “Reggae Woman.” It also included another seething critique of Nixon in “You Haven’t Done Nothing.” Wonder spent the next two years in his studio, waiting until 1976 to release Songs in the Key of Life. This album was hailed as his masterpiece, with upbeat acoustic including a tribute to Duke Ellington in “Sir Duke” and a tribute to his newly born daughter, “Isn’t She Lovely.” It also marked the end of Wonder’s prime. He followed up with a mostly instrumental album, Journey Through the Secret Life of Plants in 1979, and then Hotter Than July in 1980. Both these albums were blander than his previous work, and although he continues to make music to this day, he never made it back to the superstar status he had made for himself in the mid seventies. David Stubbs attributes his decline to his inability to keep up with the techno pace of disco, despite the electronic complexity of his synthesizers, saying, “On the Seventies LPs, he’d play the drums himself, keeping time rather than establishing a big-ass rhythm.”

Stevie Wonder was extremely influential to music, transcending genres by somehow representing funk, soul, pop, jazz, and rock all at once. Wonder’s genius is that he was able to songwriter, play instruments, sing, and produce. In Wonder’s very successful career, he’s won 22 Grammys and three albums of the year. Wonder’s classic sequence of albums from 1972-1976 cements his as one of the greatest artists of all time.
For its 40 years of existence, hip hop music has been under constant criticism for its explicit lyrics and depiction of women. People say that it influences youth culture and has a lasting impact on attitudes towards women. I’m here to challenge the possible reasons why people choose to listen to rap music, and what those implications can have.

Race has played an integral part in social relations from the birth of this nation and even more so now. Everywhere we look, it is there, more salient in some places than in others, but always a factor. We are products of a racially socialized society that enforces and recreates stereotypes, that’s just in our nature. But why is rap music specifically targeted for its degrading of women when a lot of music not in the hip hop genre does the same thing?

Hip hop music is just telling a story of what culture is like now, popular songs are popular because people like them, and sometimes they are not a reflection of artistic genius. There are many hip hop songs and artists that do not objectify women. Artists like Chance the Rapper and J. Cole are examples of more introspective artists that do not heavily sing about sexual activity.

Our culture influences the music we currently have. Popular rappers such as Migos, in the song “Bad and Boujee,” use explicit lyrics to objectify women. The chorus, “My bitches bad and boujee,” is very problematic, referring to women as bitches and creating a nasty image of them. This is representative of a larger societal problem, and the hyper masculinity that our culture creates. With childish-like rhyme schemes, and a catchy hook, this song became popular, but how did it become popular? Through distribution of music and radio play, it topped the charts. People want to hear that song and explicitness in the music.

American society has deep rooted issues and music merely reflects the broader things in culture today. The movies we watch objectify women, the pictures we see objectify women; we learn it from an early age. Singing out hip hop music is counterproductive and only reinforces a racial hierarchy, such as Fox News blasting Kendrick Lamar for performing on top of a police car. In an effort to challenge the social issues of today, he was trying to send a message to take a stand against police brutality. It’s the singing out, in itself, that is the problem. We are only products of the environment we live in, and therefore it’s not okay to blame a certain genre for influencing attitudes.
At the prestigious 2017 Met Gala Dinner, Jennifer Lopez breaks out some dance moves as world famous rap group, Migos, performs on stage.[1] Although J-Lo has a front seat to the action tonight, millions of others across the globe can jam to Migos tunes at the same time. Tonight, the group is being fer Lopez breaks out some dance moves as world famous rap group, Migos, performs on stage.[1] Although J-Lo has a front seat to the action tonight, millions of others across the globe can jam to Migos tunes at the same time. Tonight, the group is being

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