

The Influence of African American Subculture to the American Mainstream Culture

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SVEUČILIŠTE U RIJECI
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**The influence of African American subculture to the American
mainstream culture**

(B.A. Thesis)

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Abstract

According to 2020 research, roughly 12% of the population in the United States of America self-identifies as Black.(Slack, 2021) With the Hispanics being the only larger minority group in the country, there is no denying that the African American subculture has a massive impact on American society as a whole. This B.A. thesis aims to depict the influence of African American art, predominantly music, in the United States of America while depicting its origin and evolution. The thesis will present African American music in chronological order of its development, up until the beginning of the twenty-first century. Being the focal point of the thesis, the rap era will be depicted most thoroughly, since it is the latest iteration of African American music. In addition, rap tackles some of the biggest issues of American society, and since 2017, it has been the most popular music genre in the United States of America. (Billboard Explains, 2021)The influence of rap will be depicted through a presentation of some of the most prominent artists and activists who were a part of the genre. The thesis will conclude by discussing the influence that African American people had on, the film industry in the United States, especially in Hollywood.

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1. The early stages of African American music

There is no way of understanding modern African American music without looking into its origins, and the role it has played within the slave communities. The first stage of African Americans music in America can be described as a period between their arrival on the continent, and their subsequent conversion to Christianity. In his article on the origins of African American music, Kalamu ya Salaam claims that African Americans who have been shipped to America as slaves did not have a chance to develop their language. He states that the Standard American Language was forced upon them, depriving them of the opportunity to use their native language in everyday activities. For that reason, they have started developing music that would pose a substitute for a such vital part of their identity that was taken from them. Furthermore, music was an outlet that was always readily available to them, as they would use their voices and bodies to make music since they had no access to African instruments. (ya Salaam, 2015) African instruments, such as drums, were forbidden once started being perceived as catalysts for rebellions by the slave owners. (Epstein, Sands, 2015) Furthermore, the music went hand in hand with African American's communal activities, since their aim when making this music was not to perform in front of an audience. They used music to regulate the pace of their work as well as to alleviate some of the hardships brought by the harsh living conditions they found themselves in. In addition, African Americans would encourage their children to partake in musical activities, as they believed singing and moving their bodies while following the rhythm would improve their creativity and coordination. Christopher Small presents the word *music* as a verb, rather than a noun, due to the fact he perceives music as an activity people partake in. (Small, 1998) The songs they would sing were most often the call-response songs. A call-response song is a song fashioned in a manner that a person who leads the song articulates a musical piece, which is later answered by other people partaking in the song. There elements can overlap (Epstein, Sands, 2015)

The African Americans would achieve this style of composing by alternating phrases in the call-response exchange, as well as overlapping with the lead singer while dancing to a rhythmic pattern that was characteristic of that of Africa. Such rhythmic patterns didn't align with the contemporary music rules and scales used in Europe. For that reason, musicologists had a difficult time making music notations of early African American music, hence often altered it, making it lose its most prominent characteristics. (Epstein, Sands, 2015)

During this early stage of African American music, its influence was not felt in the American mainstream, since its scope didn't stretch beyond the African American communities. Music was a tool used for the preservation of African heritage, while singing and dancing were methods of bringing African American communities closer to each other. However, it plays a vital role in the development of ensuing genres.

2. The rise of Gospel music

2.1 The Second Great Awakening

The next major step in the evolution of African American music is the development of Gospel music during the Second Great Awakening. The Second Great Awakening is a period in the United States of America that lasted from 1795 until 1835. The event can be most accurately described as a resurrection of religion, and the result of such a paradigm shift was a sudden surge in the number of people who belonged to a church, especially Methodist and Baptist ones. (Mohamed et al., 2021)

When African slaves first arrived in the United States of America, most of them were followers of Western-African religions. However, the minority Christian groups quickly managed to spread Christianity among other slaves, which troubled their owners, since they were afraid slaves would see themselves as equals.

In addition, Richard Allen, a former slave who bought his freedom, founded the African Methodist Episcopal Church in 1800. Since its foundation, Allen's movement sent a large number of preachers to the South, convincing many African Americans to join their Church. (Mohamed et al., 2021)

2.2 The surge of Gospel

The circumstances described in the previous paragraph laid a perfect foundation for the emergence of a new African American music genre, gospel. Gospel can be defined as African American Christian music consisting of various elements of oral African American music tradition. The roots of the gospel date back to Christian slaves who practiced psalm-singing, but as the genre evolved, the gospel embraced a new form of music, hymns. “Negro Spirituals“, a genre of music that would later be named gospel, shared plenty of similarities with its predecessors in African American music. Similar to the call-response format, the gospel hymns had a leader who would sing a specific portion of the hymn, with the early iteration of a choir repeating the words after him. (Booth, 2019)

However, while African Americans who were enslaved sang songs about freedom and salvation in the literal sense, the gospel was used to sing Christian praise songs, which enabled preachers to spread Christianity in the South at the beginning of the nineteenth century. (ya Salaam, 2015)

What followed up was the emergence of the African American Quartet tradition, which was a singing movement that came to fruition after the American Civil War. In the European tradition, a quartet is based on the number of members performing a song, while in African American tradition, a quarter can consist of four to six voices singing a four-part harmony. In most cases, the quartet performs the song a capella, but occasionally, it can be accompanied by native African instruments, such as drums. (Jackson, 2015)

2.3 The Jubilee quartet

In 1866, Fisk University was founded to provide education to newly freed African Americans. However, the school struggled financially ever since its opening. In order to prevent the school from closing down, a group of students went on a musical tour under the guidance of their music teacher George L White. (Our History, n.d.) Up until that point, the contemporary mainstream media did not understand the depth of African American music, since African Americans had no medium through which they could present their culture. However, after the formation of the Fisk Jubilee Singers, that narrative changed. Their 1870s tour marked the beginning of mainstream interest from ethnologists and musicologists alike. (Williams-Jones, 1975) By the end of their tour in 1878, they have managed to raise 150 000\$, which was enough to present the Fisk campus with the Jubilee Hall. Simultaneously, they have managed to expand the reach of gospel music beyond African American communities, and the United States of America. (Burnim, 2015)

Williams-Jones described a gospel performance as follows:

“ Gospel has distilled the aesthetic essence of the black arts into a unified whole. It is a colorful kaleidoscope of black oratory, poetry, drama, and dance. One has only to experience a gospel "happening" in its cultural setting to hear black poetry in the colorful oratory of the black gospel preacher, or to see the drama of an emotion-packed performance of a black gospel choir interacting with its gospel audience, and the resulting shout of the holy dance. It is indeed a culmination of the black aesthetic experience.” (William-Jones, 2015, 376)

Alongside their success, the Fisk Jubilee Singers were also responsible for the development of singing quartets across predominantly African American universities, as, by the 1890s, the quartet culture placed its roots within African American colleges. Jackson, 1988

The amount of influence the gospel music, as well as the Jubilee quartet, have had on American mainstream can not be overlooked. The prime example of that is the fact that October 6th, 2021, marked the 150th anniversary of this historic group, which to this day performs all across the United States of America. (Performances, n.d.)

3. Ragtime

At the turn of the twentieth century, a new genre of African American music emerged. What later became known as ragtime, was a genre that was at the height of its popularity from 1896 to 1920. (Harer, 2015) This music genre found its place in Sedalia Missouri and was led by Scott Joplin, who settled in the city. Being a pianist, as well as a leading ragtime composer, Joplin himself stated that ragtime was primarily pianist music. Although it was interchangeable with jazz at the time, the difference between ragtime and its successor is the improvisation element. Joplin advocated a very strict view on music, influenced by European music tradition, whose grasp on Joplin could not be overlooked, due to the fact he composed two operas. However, with European and African American cultures becoming intertwined, white ragtime artists would become to emerge. What was peculiar about this is the fact music experts were not able to tell the difference between ragtime performers who were, and those who were not of African descent. The genre struck a chord especially well among the workers building railroads across the continent, which could be attributed to the fact genre was created using an unusual metric rhythm, which was suited for dancing. (Berendt & Huesmman, 2015)

One specific dance variant marked the ragtime period, and that was Cakewalk. Cakewalk was a couple's dance which was a satire of the White upper-class behavior. Several couples would perform the Cakewalk, and they would be eliminated, one by one, from the competition by a group of judges. The last remaining couple would receive a decorated cake at the end of the contest, according to which the dance was named. (Harer, 2015)

4. The Harlem Renaissance

To fully understand the development of African American music at the beginning of the 20th century in the United States of America, it is important to understand the circumstances under which these new genres came to be. With World War 1 coming to a close, a new era in African American culture had begun, and it spanned two decades following the War. One of the key elements of the Harlem Renaissance's prosperity was the Great Migration, during which African Americans moved from the rural areas of the South, to the cities in the North. This caused a spike in literacy rate among African Americans, who used their newfound education as means of expressing their creativity. (Hutchison, 2018.) Although the name of the movement suggests it took place in Harlem, the Harlem Renaissance was not exclusive to the New York neighborhood. While Harlem was the epicenter, it quickly emerged in several other American cities, such as New Orleans and St. Louis, which consequently became hubs of new music genres. (Wintz & Finkelman, 2004) .

The movement revolves around the term “New Negro“, which Huggins describes as follows:

“The “New Negro“ was telling all Americans that it was a new ballgame, and that he was a revived and inspired competitor. No longer could he be dismissed by contempt, pity, or terror. He would insist upon his rights, and, if necessary, return violence, blow for blow.“ (Huggings, 1995, 3)

While the Harlem Renaissance marked one of the most fruitful periods of African American writing, sculpting, as well as composing, it presents much more. It is a symbol of twentieth century African Americans who completely liberated themselves from the shackles of slavery, and became sophisticated, equally treated members of American society. (Huggings, 1995)

5. Blues

With the Harlem Renaissance firmly in place, the African American subculture experienced a surge in the number of artists their communities produced. Accordingly, African American music developed a new genre that would mark the first half of the twentieth century. Blues was a genre of secular African American music that developed in the American South. Although blues performances are always assimilated with instruments, blues is predominantly a vocal form, as its lyricism was the driving force of the genre. The main focus of the blues singer was to express emotions, such as sadness or melancholy, using the various techniques that would come to be recognized as important later on in the evolution of American and global music. (Blues, 2019) The cradle of blues was the American city of New Orleans. The city was already a cultural melting pot at the turn of the beginning of the twentieth century, due to it being ruled by the Spanish and French alike before its emancipation prior to the emancipation of what we have later come to know as the State of Louisiana. Alongside those two influences, the city was comprised of former slaves, as well as German and English inhabitants. For that reason, there was a constant interaction between African American music practice, as well as the European style of making music. (Berendt&Husserman, 2009) In addition, ever since its conception, blues was seen as a commercial music genre, which was further backed up by the fact that blues tours across the United States became a common occurrence among blues performers. This caused a massive spike in the popularity of blues, and with the growing need for black performers, dancers and singers alike, an entire class of African American artists found their role in American society. (Evans, 2015)

As mentioned at the beginning of the chapter, the impact of blues music would not be recognized until the end of the twentieth century. During the 1970s, a lot of White Americans began to recognize the complexity of blues, as the genre played an important role in the development of modern American music. Alongside its ability to express emotion, the European roots of early blues singers established a variety of music techniques that were used later on by the early jazz performers, as well as the early-day rap artists. (Evans, 2015)

6. Jazz

Jazz is another iteration of the music genres that were a product of African American culture in the twentieth century. Although it has developed at the same time and in the same city as blues, the main difference between the two genres lies in the fact that, for the first time, the emphasis of African American music is put on the instruments, rather than the vocal performance. (Monson, 2015) The development of jazz was heavily influenced by the diversity of New Orleans. As mentioned in the previous chapter, New Orleans was a diverse community, but that diversity was also felt among African Americans. New Orleans was home to two types of African Americans, with one being the Creole, and the other being “American Negroes“. While the former were a product of French colonialism, meaning that their ancestors were freed long before their “American Negroes“ counterparts. This led to the Creoles amassing wealth, as well as getting the proper education while embracing the French culture as their own. On the other hand, “American Negroes“ fulfilled the role of a lower-black class in New Orleans, as they had no education, and their music was transmitted orally. (Berendt&Husserman, 2009)

The two cultures came into contact after the Jim Crow segregation, which implored racial divide in the communities across the United States of America. (Urofsky, 2018) Because of the racial divide among the citizens, the Creoles were no longer a member of the White society, so they gravitated toward the “American Negroes“. The conjunction of the Creole's music literacy and the “American Negroes“ instrumental prominence produced this new genre, known as jazz. (Monson, 2015) Although the first figure that comes to everyone's mind when they hear the word “jazz“ is Louis Armstrong, the founder of jazz was Buddy Bolen. Bolen was a music teacher in New Orleans, who also played with his band at ceremonies and parties. Only one photograph of the band was preserved, but it gives insight into the band structures of New Orleans jazz performers. Alongside a guitar, bass, drums, cornet, and valve trombone, the band had two clarinetists. This is a stark example of interaction between the two African American cultures in New Orleans, as clarinet was a staple of Creole music, while drums are an irreplaceable part of African musical heritage. (Gioia, 2011)

7.R&B

In the post-World War Two era, a genre called “Rhythm and Blues (R&B)” developed in New Orleans, similarly to blues and jazz before it. What separated this new genre from its New Orleans' predecessor was the fact the main focus was no longer on a band as a whole, or a vocalist performance, but rather on a catchy drummer beat. (Stewart, 2000) The Second Great Migration of African Americans in the United States also played a major role in the development of R&B. The Second Great Migration is a lesser known chapter of African Americans journey across the American continent, but it played a significant role in the way American society as a whole developed in the second part of the twentieth century. The Second Great Migration took place between 1940 and 1980, with the 1940s and the 1950s being the years when most African Americans left their rural homes. It is estimated that around 5 million people left their homes in the American south, with their destination being larger American cities in the North, such as New York and Chicago, as only 11% of migrants settled in smaller cities and rural areas. (Stewart, 2000)

Such a shift in the landscape of the United States of America's population suited the development of R&B. With some men being drafted in World War Two, and others migrating from their place of residence during and after the War, many jazz and blues bands fell apart, leading to a large influx of skilled musicians arriving to large cities across America. (Maultsby, 2015)

The 1950s were a time when R&B caught the attention of the American mainstream, as the invention of the jukebox and the newly invented radio enabled independent labels to expand the reach of their music. In addition, the labels started selling their records that were transported across the United States via train. The genre reached the White population during the same period because White teenagers wanted to establish their own identity, causing R&B to explode in popularity in the white neighborhoods of the United States. (Maultsby, 2015)

8. Funk

During the tail end of the 1960s and the beginning of the 1970, a new genre of party music appeared in the United States. Funk was a genre that combined elements of jazz, blues, and R&B, to create a new iteration of African American music. Funk shared a lot of properties with the earlier variants of African American music, such as polyrhythm, expression of feelings through music, as well as preservice of the African identity of the Black people. The lyrics of the genre were designed to reach the African American working-class communities, to which the funk performers belonged prior to their musical success. (Maultsby 2015)

9. Hip-hop

Often mistaken for rap, hip-hop is best described as a movement that first appeared in African American communities in the Bronx neighborhood of New York City during the 1970s. It was a subculture that was comprised of various expressive elements such as DJ-ing, graffitiing, break-dancing, and most importantly, rapping. (Nortfleet 2015)

9.1 Old-school hip-hop

DJs were the moving force behind the early days of hip-hop. They had the ability to play and maneuver the pre-recorded discs using their mixing units, in order to distinguish hip-hop from regular poetry. One of the pioneers of the hip-hop movement is Clive Campbell, now a 67-year-old man, also known as Dj Herc. He was a Jamaican-born African American who arrived in the Bronx during the late 1960s. In the early 1970s, he began hosting parties throughout his neighborhood, causing the hip-hop craze to spread like wildfire throughout African American communities. (Nortfleet, 2015) Furthermore, rappers were embracing the musical elements of their ancestors, such as the call-response technique, as well as improvisation, in order to keep up with the DJs who played the music. (Perkins, 1996)

However, the subculture would not be introduced to the American mainstream until 1979, when the “Sugar Hill Gang“ released a record titled “ Rappers Delight“, from which point on, the hip-hop subculture entered the American mainstream. (Abe, 2009) When it first appeared on the music scene, the music critics had little faith in both hip-hop and rap, predicting its quick failure. However, hip hop and rap caused a shift in American fashion, as they popularised loose-fitting, oversized clothes, as well as the combination of seemingly random colors, which matched the highly developing street graffiti art. (Perkins, 1996)

While hip-hop and rap aimed to tackle the issues happening within the black communities, such as problems related to addiction and violence, they resonated so well with young people across the United States due to those problems being universal across the country. Furthermore, those who did not struggle with said problems, but still felt like they didn't fit in the mainstream schema of the society, found solace among the outcast presented in rap. (Simmons,2002)

Following the success of “Rappers Delight“, members of the African American community such as Russell Simmons and Rick Rubin realized how fertile the rap genre can be within the hip-hop subculture. In 1984, the pair established an independent label called “Def

Jam Records“, whose production would later be described as aggressive and “street-oriented“ music. Such a style of music turned out to be extremely fruitful, as the label's artists reached high levels of success when it came to sales of this subgenre of rap.

9.1.1. Public Enemy

Furthermore, the label kept pushing the boundaries of public criticism, as they began working with the Long Island group called “Public Enemy“. Unlike the early rap artists before them, Public Enemy spoke about politics and societal issues, which would become one of the most recognizable themes in rap music. (Nortfleet 2015) The problems depicted in this new way of rapping were those of poor living conditions, lack of well-paid jobs for African Americans, poor schooling et cetera. Young African Americans quickly assimilated with such character, which led to feelings of animosity towards institutions that treated them in such a manner. (Perkins, 1996)

9.1.2 Niggaz Wit Attitudes

None other portrayed this view as the Los Angeles-based rap group “Niggaz Wit Attitudes“. The group was associated with the Los Angeles city of Compton, which was one of rap's hubs during the 1980s and the 1990s. As members of “The West Coast“, they conjoined the African American and American gangster who makes money by doing illegal activities, such as selling drugs. This culminated with the release of their first full-length album called “Straight Outta Compton“ in 1988, whose negative influence was highlighted by one of the songs on the album, which was titled “F__ the Police“. The song reached such heights that even the Federal Bureau of Investigation had to get involved since the group used its immense reach in order to call upon violence and disrespect toward law enforcement. (Nortfleet 2015) It is safe to assume there is an impasse between rap music and institutions in the United States of America. While young African American teenagers assimilate with characters described in rap songs, those same institutions young African Americans boycott see them as a threat.

10. New-school hip-hop

It seems peculiar that such an aggressive genre of music could solidify its spot at the top of the Billboard charts in the twenty-first century. The reason for that lies in the fact that contemporary hip-hop differs greatly from the twentieth-century version. Levels of production took major strides in the twenty-first century, and so did the distribution and marketing strategies, propelling rap into the musical stratosphere. This new variant of rap used modern technologies, such as autotuning, in order to change the pitch of the rapper's voice, often reducing the levels of aggressiveness, bringing rap music much closer to other mainstream genres like pop. Such combination, one of a genre tackling important social problems, but refined to a point of being less aggressive, if aggressive at all, was a reason for this new variant of hip-hop to take over the modern-day United States. (Nortfleet, 2015)

In addition, new school hip-hop introduced the rap genre to mainstream rappers who are not African American. A prime example of this is an artist who goes by the name Eminem and is one of the best-selling rap artists of the millennium. Growing up under poor living conditions in the city of Michigan, Eminem was able to relate to the issues African American rappers were basing their music on. Due to such circumstances, he started practicing rap, and subsequently became the pioneer of White rappers in the United States. In addition, he collaborated with African American artists, such as former members of the previously mentioned Niggaz Wit Attitudes group. The result of this was Eminem's breakthrough to rap the scene, as he amassed 11 Grammy awards, alongside being inducted into the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame. (Eminem, 2019) With such a résumé, there is no point in trying to deny Eminem's influence on the rap genre. However, his success is especially important due to the fact he was not African American, as he brought the genre to an entirely new audience, setting the stage for the growth of rap's popularity in the United States of America.

11. African Americans and the movie industry

Filmmaking is another art platform through which African Americans were able to be portrayed to the American mainstream. In addition, it was a modern medium they could use in order to share their views on society as a whole.

11.1 The plantation genre

In the early days of American cinematography, which is a period that took place from the inception of American cinema in the 1890s, all the way to the post-World War II period, African Americans in movies were portrayed in either a mocking or stereotypical fashion. Such depiction of African Americans in the film was a clear indicator of this art form was also being heavily influenced by politics and prejudice. The clearest example of such degradation of African Americans was through the “plantation genre“. The genre was mainly focused on depicting the slave life of early African Americans, and it was the main reason American cinematography came into conflict with the early African American activists. While aiming to make monetary gain from the movies, directors would often misrepresent the elements of life in slavery, causing misinformation to spread among the general public. Following the end of World War II, the genre recognized its flaws, most likely due to the rise in the number of activists who fought for African American rights during the period and had undergone certain modifications that caused the genre to depict slaves in a more respectful manner. (Guerrero,1993)

11.2. Blaxploitation

The rising racial awareness among the African American also caused a rise in the number of movies produced for African American audiences. The plot of these movies would most often be centered around the ghetto, with a black cast who were involved in stereotypical African American narratives. However, due to the fact, these movies were made for the inner-city, young African Americans who were not able to break the box office profit records, these movies would often lack production quality. The eventual demise of Blaxploitation was the fact that Hollywood's survival did not depend on the African American audiences, and because of that, Hollywood would gradually start reducing the production of such moves. (Guerrero,1993)

11.2.2. The turn of the millennium and modern Blaxploitation

Although the concept of Blaxploitation seemed to be abolished during the twentieth century, some still argue the concept still lingers in modern, twenty-first-century

cinematography. One of the most popular and profitable movie genres of the twenty-first century is Science Fiction. However, it seems like the science fiction genre is still out of reach for African American directors. According to several testimonies given by African American directors, it is obvious that they are still being directed toward movies that depict the ghetto, as well as occurrences in African American families. While these ideas are being presented as fruitful due to the African American director's "better understanding" of modern African American problems, such an approach deepens the problem of Blaxploitation. For that reason, African American directors comprise no more than a measly 2% of total directors within the Science Fiction movie genre. An example of such behavior can be noticed when analyzing the Marvel Comic Cinematic Universe franchise. These movies have a budget ranging from 137 to 250 million dollars, yet it took eighteen movies until the Marvel Comic Cinematic Universe presented its first African American movie director, with the release of the 2018 movie "Black Panther". (Erigha, 2016) Although this can be seen as the adoption of African American directors to the blockbuster scene, it is hard to overlook the fact that the Marvel Comic Cinematic Universe opted for an African American director to direct the movie focused on an imaginary nation of African descent who live in sub-Saharan Africa.

When it comes to actors in twenty-first-century Science Fiction movies, the most notable name is by far Will Smith. He embodied a lead role in several movies that he was also the director of. However, his lead roles were not a product of an attempt to change the landscape of modern-day Hollywood, but rather of his influence on the project, due to his dual role.

11.3. Movies and Hip-Hop

It is interesting to note the connection between hip-hop culture, rap, and the cinematography of the United States of America. As rap gradually became more and more popular, Hollywood understood they could benefit from producing movies revolving around famous hip-hop artists. The aforementioned rapper Eminem starred in a movie titled "8 Mile", a loosely autobiographical motion picture that portrays a young and up-and-coming rapper who dealt with adversity as a White person in a predominantly African American community of Detroit. Although the movie centered around an actor who was not African American, the movie helped rap reach a broader audience, as the movie's soundtrack won an Academy Award for Best Original Song in 2003.(8 Mile, n.d.) . Furthermore, the 2010s witnessed a rise in autobiographical movies of some of the most popular African American artists. In 2015, a

movie titled “Straight Outta Compton“ was released. It was another movie about rappers in the United States of America, but “Straight Outta Compton“ portrayed the lives and careers of members of the group Niggaz Wit Attitudes. The movie was named after their previously mentioned controversial album, hinting at the fact not much has actually changed in the United States of America since the album's release in 1988. (Herman et al., 2015) Furthermore, the movie is an example of anti- Blaxploitation, as most of the cast were African Americans, alongside a director of African American descent, and a 208 million dollars the movie made.

11. Conclusion

The goal of this essay was to depict the role and influence the African American people had on the society of the United States, through music and film. The early stages of African American music revolved around elements that were characteristic of the African continent. Early generations of African Americans used music in order to preserve their heritage, as well as for their music to accompany their rituals. In addition, music was a tool they used while working in the fields, and such a style of singing later became known as call-response singing.

What followed this period was the period of the Second Great Awakening, which had a major impact on the African Americans. Plenty of them converted to versions of Christianity, which led to development of gospel. Gospel adopted elements of traditional African music, such as clapping and the call-response song format, but the theme of the gospel was Christianity, which signaled the earliest stage of assimilation of African Americans in the United States.

What followed was the development of several African American musical genres that coincided with one another. This was due to the start of the Harlem Renaissance, a movement that placed an African American person as an independent artist. First of those new genres was Ragtime, a genre represented by the Cakewalk dance which mocked the White upper-class. Subsequently, New Orleans became the focal point of music, and it gave birth to blues. Blues was primarily a vocal performance, although blues singers were often accompanied by instruments. Its main goal was the expression of sad emotions through music. After blues came jazz, which adopted elements of both blues and ragtime, while placing the focus on instrumental performance with one distinct feature, that being improvisation.

What followed was the Second Great Migration, which caused African Americans to move to the city from rural areas, and the new inhabitants of big cities formed new bands that produces the R&B genre, whose main focus was on catchy drummer beats. Later on, R&B adopted jazz elements that would lead to the creation of funk, a genre that would open the door for hip-hop

Hip-hop was a cultural movement that overlapped with the rap genre, with its main focus being placed on vocalizing the disparities and inequity in American society. It first appeared in Bronx, but its influence was evident on the West Coast of the United States, where it produced some of the genre's most notable groups who were very explicit about their dissatisfaction with the institutions and their representatives. However, with the use of modern-day technology, rap

progressively started gravitating toward pop music, while retaining some of its social themes, making it the most popular genre in the contemporary United States of America.

In addition, the role of African Americans in cinematography of the United States varied throughout history, but taking its recent success into consideration, it is safe to say a positive trend is taking place.

Being a person who has been listening to rap and following the hip-hop culture for half of my life, doing research on its origins deepened my understanding of why so explicit the genre is. Although it is the latest product of African American music, in its essence, rap tackles the same issues its ancestors dealt with in the sixteenth century. Although in a much-refined manner, rap uses its heritage to express its dissatisfaction with American society. Although the image of American society includes freedom, the irony of African American music lies within the fact that African Americans have been trying to voice the issues they deal with, in both literal and metaphorical sense, yet from call-response songs to rap, they are yet to be fully understood.

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