

Summer 8-7-2013

# American Vernacular music in the Social Studies Classroom

Eric C. Yanis

*The College at Brockport*, eyani1@u.brockport.edu

Follow this and additional works at: [http://digitalcommons.brockport.edu/ehd\\_theses](http://digitalcommons.brockport.edu/ehd_theses)



Part of the [Liberal Studies Commons](#)

To learn more about our programs visit: <http://www.brockport.edu/ehd/>

---

## Repository Citation

Yanis, Eric C., "American Vernacular music in the Social Studies Classroom" (2013). *Education and Human Development Master's Theses*. 210.

[http://digitalcommons.brockport.edu/ehd\\_theses/210](http://digitalcommons.brockport.edu/ehd_theses/210)

This Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by the Education and Human Development at Digital Commons @Brockport. It has been accepted for inclusion in Education and Human Development Master's Theses by an authorized administrator of Digital Commons @Brockport. For more information, please contact [kmyers@brockport.edu](mailto:kmyers@brockport.edu).

American Vernacular Music in the Social Studies Classroom

by

Eric C. Yanis  
Summer, 2013

A thesis submitted to the Department of Education and Human Development of the State  
University of New York College at Brockport in partial  
Fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of  
Master of Science in Education

Eric Yanis

Shotguns and Snipers Rifles:  
Historiography of American vernacular music

There are two major scholarly traditions of composing literature on American music. The first approach is like a sawed-off shotgun trying to hit everything: the full history of American music from its earliest to as current as deemed necessary, encompassing every ethnicity and region considered American. In the historiography these are the large encyclopedic volumes first conceived of in the Victorian Age continuing to some extent until today. The second tradition is like a sniper rifle trying to hit a specific target, usually focused on identifying the music at the center of American culture original to the United State alone. This tradition is much newer only developing after the revolutionary influence (in the musical, political and social sense) of sixties, leaving people to argue over whom or what is more American than the rest. So while the large volumes try to define the *breadth* of all American music against the rest of the world, the second more precise tradition tries to define where American music has the greatest *depth*.

Within these two narratives are a plethora of differing opinions all divided on issues concerning the origin, first songwriter, first genre, greatest songwriter and greatest genre, most American, of uniquely American character. The nature of American character itself, considered by the authors, determine their views on these questions of *first, greatest and most*. The role of African Americans in creating their own traditions and the influence of these traditions on American music as a whole is a hotly debated and dominating piece in formulating what each author considers the American character. Consuming all these questions is the focus of the historian on either high-art or popular musical form as the important medium of American expression.

For the purposes of this historiographical study the focus will not be on the high-art, classical, avant-garde or other forms of music that are intended to be either exclusive or scholarly. What this historiography will cover is American vernacular music, which is a term used by H. Wiley Hitchcock (whose volume is included in this study) along with many other notable historians over the years,

including Benjamin Filene. Vernacular music, by my definition based on how historians use the term, is any music created by or intended for ordinary people not needing musical training to appreciate and has some connection to the culture of the creator and listener.

### **The Shotguns**

The beginning of the large, all-encompassing, volumes of American music predates the serious study of vernacular music. In the 19<sup>th</sup> century nearly every historian or musicologist writing about American musical tradition focuses on the inaccessible high art forms of classical music and opera. A major theme among these historians is that American high art is not only a mere reflection of contemporary European movements; it is also mostly inferior to it. As high art being barely worth studying in America, next to that of Europe, vernacular music is just non-existent in these works. These volumes do mention the vernacular religious music of the Puritans and often the Pilgrims as the first *American* music, and give some attention to religious music in general to a point. This Puritan beginning is consistent with the general American narratives of the time, and as in other historiography the founding myth of the Puritans, is persistent and difficult to overcome.

There are small incursions into high-art American music volumes that slowly bring vernacular music to the forefront. Louis C. Elson's, *American Music*, (1915) is typical of the transitional period after 1900 and before the 1940's where vernacular music begins to build in importance, albeit on the sidelines to the exclusive forms of music outlined. Elson mostly covers patriotic anthems, operas, ballets, classical, and religious music. He ignores the Native American music tradition altogether and begin the history of music in America with the Puritans. To Elson the religious music of the Puritans formed the very basis for all American music, he states explicitly, “the mother of American music is New England Psalmody.”<sup>1</sup> As latter historians will point out this connection between Puritan music and American vernacular and high-art music is almost non-existent; however, using the Puritans as a

---

<sup>1</sup> Louis C. Elson, *American Music* (New York City: The Macmillan Company, 1915) 361.

starting point reflects the larger mythology of American history to use Plymouth as a starting point. Only recently has this explanation of American origins subsided.

What historians like Elson ignore during this period is the musical development happening in the older and larger Virginia colony. Ultimately the historiography will progress toward acknowledging that the South is the source for most distinctive forms of American music as this is where the African and British traditions blended. However, Elson ignores the South and African Americans completely until covering the time after the Civil War.

During this first generation of American music historians the Puritans have the first American music and William Billings who lived during the Revolution is the first “native composer.”<sup>2</sup> Billings comes from Puritan heritage and wrote religious choral music, which fits perfectly into the narrative of these early volumes. Elson views Billings and the Puritans as the direct source for much of American music and ignores any other type of music associated with a unique American local or ethnicity until his 123<sup>rd</sup> of 367 pages.<sup>3</sup> When Elson does address the non-academic music of everyday Americans he specifies that vernacular music is important, because it is a source of inspiration for composer of high-art.<sup>4</sup> So the music that the majorities of Americans create and enjoy throughout our history is only important when it is borrowed by educated composers. Elson actually claims of American folk music, “It is admitted that in this field America is rather barren.”<sup>5</sup> This focus on the exclusive art forms demonstrates the growing divide between the American people and their own high-art forms of music that later historians identify as a gradual separation accelerating into the 20th century.

Within the first generation of American music historians is the beginning of the debate concerning African American music traditions. Interestingly historians have always included African

---

2 Ibid, 12.

3 Ibid, 123.

4 Ibid.

5 Ibid.

American music into the fold of what is *American*, although at this early stage it is often on the sidelines and not a major force central to the creation of new music. Elson characterizes African American folk music as American in creation with some African roots.<sup>6</sup> Influenced by historians who study the history of slavery in American, the debate over how much truly African culture survived in the American South is extended to music. As the historiography progresses it will generally match the slavery debate trying to determine if slavery was oppressive to the point of eradicating African culture, or slaves had enough agency to maintain traditions.

Elson admits that our popular music is somewhat influenced by African American tradition and imagery, such as in the case of Stephen Foster who the author claims is the, “folk-song genius of America.”<sup>7</sup> The influence of African American music on Foster leads Elson to have to defend Foster's Anglo-Saxon roots, claiming that although Foster's father is Irish, his genius comes from his mother who is of old English stock.<sup>8</sup> Foster continues to be a central figure throughout the historiography gradually taking the place of William Billings as the first American composer. Overall Elson views American music as essentially English.

Elson concludes his volume with a section of sharp criticism about what is wrong with American music, many of these things later historians praised as exactly what made American music unique. The proper and historically valid force behind the great works of American music, according to Elson, is music education at Universities.<sup>9</sup> It is through patron support and recognition of high-art that the best American music is produced everything else suffers from being too popular and so overly simplistic. Elson criticizes American music as being too attached to profit making from the general population instead of focusing on the aesthetics of the art form. Building off of this critic of populism,

---

6 Ibid, 133.

7 Ibid, 134.

8 Ibid, 135.

9 Ibid, 362.

Elson identifies rampant piano ownership by the musically untrained as a major problem in America. Causing all of this is “haste” which Elson calls the “demon” of American music; too many American musicians do not finish proper musical training and rush off to compose and perform without the benefit of a University education.<sup>10</sup> After Elson and his peers historians begin to recognize the availability and popularity of making and playing music across race, ethnicity, education level and class as a major strength unique to the United States.

The historiography makes a significant change toward vernacular music after World War Two. Sigmund Spaeth in his 1948 volume, *A History of Popular Music in America*, takes a very progressive view among his contemporaries reversing the true direction of influence from Elson's top-down direction to vernacular music as the creative force behind American music. The work divides the development of American music down into clear eras beginning with an infancy and adolescent period culminating during the Civil War, where thereafter each decade is its own era.<sup>11</sup> Naturally making distinction like exclusive era is in popular music is a strong position and Sigmund Spaeth does not shy away from specific and even controversial viewpoint. Popular music itself being the subject of scholarly study is perhaps the most unconventional decision Spaeth makes in producing this volume. His reasoning, somewhat ahead of his time, for writing about folk and popular music is that it is essential to understanding the American people, whereas high art is increasingly exclusive to the musical elite.<sup>12</sup>

Very soon into his work Spaeth makes clear his strong position on American *firsts*. The Puritan based Williams Billings is “our first popular composer.”<sup>13</sup> However, the first American song is not written by Billings (as logic would dictate) instead *Yankee Doodle* is “our first popular tune.”<sup>14</sup> The

---

10 Ibid, 365.

11 Sigmund Spaeth, (New York City: Random House, 1948) Table of contents.

12 Ibid, 7.

13 Ibid, 24.

14 Ibid, 15.

strange thing about Yankee Doodle is that it is a British song originally meant to taunt Americans, but it is unique in that it describes Americans as something other than British and ultimately the colonists used the song as an anthem during the American Revolution. Spath actually gives early attention to music of the Southern Colonies, of almost equal weight to that of the Puritans. Of the “hill-billy” music tradition he claims that it consists of purely old English ballad tradition and denies any African influence. This would apply to southern white music right until the end of the time-line covered in the book.<sup>15</sup>

Transitioning into the designated adolescent period of American music, Spath describes a popular music culture as largely a reflection of European tradition and fueled by immigration from France, Italy and Germany.<sup>16</sup> The main creative force in this period is contemporary music in Europe, not the native mixing of musical traditions. Later historians tend to agree that much of 19<sup>th</sup> century American pop music is merely of European extraction. This is a valid view, as it appears that when American folk tradition does assert itself on the popular scene the nature of the compositions and genres change significantly.

Spath asserts that black-face minstrelsy is the first genre that is, “entirely new and typically American.”<sup>17</sup> Right around 1843 minstrel shows became a national form of entertainment, and many historians agree with Spath that this is the first *American* music.<sup>18</sup> This is not to say that Spath glorifies black face entertainment, in fact, he acknowledges that minstrel tradition is the “exploitation of the Negro in song.”<sup>19</sup> Stephen Foster, who Elson characterized as the best among degenerates, Spath labels

---

15 Ibid, 24.

16 Ibid, 66.

17 Ibid, 71.

18 Ibid, 88.

19 Ibid, 70.

as probably the quintessential American composer with statements like, “In any history of popular music in America his names leads all the rest.”<sup>20</sup> Also recognized in this volume is the fact that Foster’s most successful songs were of the minstrel variety, underlying the importance of the man and the genre fully 20 pages of the work is dedicated to Foster.<sup>21</sup> In the long run, leading up to the Civil War the minstrel shows were influential in developing a “national sense of humor,” both being uniquely American and in themselves propagating an American image Foster and minstrelsy are at the heart of American popular music from this point on.<sup>22</sup>

Spath continuously denies the hegemony of African American influence over even clearly African American genres. He attributes the popularity of ragtime, jazz and blues to W.C. Handy. Handy was an African American composer with extensive musical education, who published songs based off of folk musicians he observed throughout trips Mississippi.<sup>23</sup> Essentially Handy is an outsider to the traditions he popularized, but Spath does not see it this way, rather because Handy is black so he an authentic reputation of African American tradition. After discussing Handy the volume focuses almost exclusively on white composers and performers for the rest of the jazz age.<sup>24</sup> On the subject of the blues, which Spath barely distinguishes from Jazz, he ignores country blues altogether and focuses on city blues forms. He claims that blues music is the result of African Americans learning the musical traditions of the Spanish and the Orient.<sup>25</sup> This conclusion is absurd, utterly baseless and the later historiography never explains the origin of the blues in similar terms. I question whether Spath actually knew very much about the blues, it appears he knew he needed to include the genre, but had little

---

20 Ibid, 103.

21 Ibid, 102-122.

22 Ibid, 137

23 Ibid, 391.

24 Ibid, 384.

25 Ibid, 391.

knowledge of how the blues differentiates from jazz tradition.

Spath constantly demonstrates an ambivalent view of African American influence on American vernacular music. From his point of view, he knows that the African element is essential in making things uniquely American against the European traditions, such as he recognizes with minstrel shows. Coupled with this everything African in his work needs to be quickly linked to other traditions and taken over by white performers. Perhaps he stresses the participation of white performers and composers, because he is releasing one of the first scholarly works on popular music, and is trying to appease the institutionalized racism of the day. By making every American popular music form mostly white, Spath legitimizes the value of his work to the established musical elite of the day. In keeping with this pattern Spath declares that the African American themed *Porgy and Bess* is “America’s greatest piece of stage music.”<sup>26</sup> The writer of *Porgy and Bess*, however, is George Gershwin, a white man, who Spath maintains as having established a status of immortality without equal in not just American music, but the world.<sup>27</sup>

In his closing remarks Spath accuses the popular swing and big band music of the 1940's as not really being jazz as he understands it.<sup>28</sup> Finally he weighs in on the supposed importance of American high-art commenting that it is still just copying whatever is happening in Europe at the time. More damningly, and certainly departing from earlier histories like Elson, Spath claims that American high-art has no “connection whatever with contemporary human experience.”<sup>29</sup> This move of priorities away from the classical, orchestral, opera and ballet forms toward American vernacular music is the general trend continuing straight into the next century.

Historian in the 1950's generally continued down the same deviation Spath set forth from the

---

26 Ibid, 506.

27 Ibid, 524.

28 Ibid, 422.

29 Ibid, 581.

earlier historians like Elson. Mostly this move is toward a building appreciate for the importance of the music written, played and enjoyed by the Americans without formal musical training. One prominent volume of the 1950's is 1957's, *A Short History of Music in America*, by John Tasker Howard and George Kent Bellows.

In great departure from earlier historians Howard and Bellows devote a good portion of their book to Native American music: right from the beginning, stating the intent to cover “the first native Indian music, down to the present day.”<sup>30</sup> Native Americans are now part of the American music narrative as Howard and Bellows take a very progressive and inclusive view of what makes music “authentically American”: the one requirement being that the person writing the song belongs to some part of the territory that now constitutes the United States.<sup>31</sup> This broad definition of American music will be refined by later generations of historians who add more qualification, mostly to the nature and spirit of the music. As Native American music created within the borders of the modern United States the music is “truly American” but a completely separate American.<sup>32</sup> By this the authors mean that Native American musical traditions have never crossed over into the vernacular music of the rest of the country and both systems exist as completely separate, and yet both American, traditions. The later historiography confirms this view, without significant exception.

After discussing Native Americans the authors revert back to the traditional narrative and start this second American musical tradition with the Puritans, dedicated eight pages to them and only a single page to all the other colonies.<sup>33</sup> This volume is more detailed in their declarations: Francis Hopkinson is considered the first native composer, but Williams Billings, “was the embodiment of the

---

30 John Tasker Howard, George Kent Bellows, *A Short History of Music in America* (New York City: Thomas Y. Crowell Company, 1957) vii.

31 Ibid, 347.

32 Ibid, 7.

33 Ibid, ix.

ingenuity, the freedom, and the daring, that is, and always has been the spirit of America.”<sup>34</sup> So while the authors take a wide view of what is American, they do recognize an inner collection of themes that are at the center of the American tradition. The later historians who write the very precise “sniper rifle” volumes are interested in defining this center of American music rather than its borders. Again despite Billings being the first American composer (here specified with the American spirit) the first truly American song is “Yankee Doodle.”<sup>35</sup>

Howard and Bellows are part of the first generation of music historians to acknowledge the fact the music of the Puritans through the revolutionary period, with rare exception, is actually completely swept away in the 19<sup>th</sup> century by both European and folk incursions.<sup>36</sup> Basically the authors, like with Native Americans, separate the popular music of the Revolutionary period from the rest of the narrative as another American, but completely unconnected tradition. In fact the authors see the Puritan tradition of New England, the Quaker tradition of the middle colonies and the African tradition of the South as the three unrelated American vernacular traditions of the early American period, while other tradition lay somewhat dormant and unrecorded in extremely local circles.<sup>37</sup>

Many of the historians throughout the study of American vernacular music recognize the unique nature of the sacred music coming out of the Second Great Awakening, however, the authors of this volume and many others argue that most of the popular music up until the Civil War is contemporary European imports.<sup>38</sup> Up until the Civil War these European influenced songs are characterized negatively by the authors as sentimental songs written by people looking to earn money and that

---

34 Ibid, 43, 57.

35 Ibid, 60.

36 Ibid, 61.

37 Ibid, 41.

38 Ibid, 39.

America's "finest heritage" is our folk songs.<sup>39</sup> The Civil War is the period that the authors indicate when American music breaks the European mold and asserts a level of independent development. The authors make a unique observation, not seen anywhere else in the historiography, but is nonetheless important: America's first unique literary exports are precursors to the new musical tradition.<sup>40</sup> Authors like Edgar Allen Poe established traditions unique to the United States and actually worthy of export to Europe, reversing the flow of influence. If we view vernacular music incorporation with the rest of the arts, this view has some validity as to export something implies a deficit elsewhere and something of substance in America.

Howard and Bellows recognize that the influence of African musical traditions is the essential ingredient differentiating music in the United States from that of Europe.<sup>41</sup> With both the African element and the growing literary reputation of the United States the authors come to the subject of minstrel shows, which they claim is, "America's most individual contribution to the theatre."<sup>42</sup> However, the authors deny that any substantial African influence went into the creation of African American music. Rather they insist that native African music is as primitive as Native American music, and the music of African American folk tradition developed in the United States and is more like English folk music than African. Being of originally European origin is the reason why composers are influenced by African American music more than Native American.<sup>43</sup> This view reflects discomfort many educated and uneducated people had at one time in admitting both that Africans might be able to produce something of significant cultural value, without help, and further that it could actually influence a European culture. A few later historians will take the extreme opposite position, accrediting

---

39 Ibid, 91.

40 Ibid, 89.

41 Ibid, 22.

42 Ibid, 103.

43 Ibid, 314.

African tradition with perhaps too much influence on certain American music genres. This back and forth debate is the musical microcosm of the larger Euro-centric tradition of scholarship and the Afro-centric reaction.

Like with previous historians once black-face entertainment becomes relevant, Stephen Foster enters the narrative. The authors highlight the fact that Foster was born on the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the nation on the same day Jefferson and Adams died adding, “Foster would some day stand beside theirs in America's Hall of Fame.”<sup>44</sup> Clearly the authors’ intent throughout this chapter is to establish Foster as part of the greater American story and make him into the *most* American composer, compared to Billings who is only the first. The authors argue that because Foster lived in the inland United States he was not exposed to European influence imported to the East coast. Foster truly is uniquely American at this time more or less stood alone against a European dominated popular music industry of the era.<sup>45</sup> Howard and Bellows really have some glowing words of praise for Foster, unparalleled for any other figure in the work, for example, “Unconsciously, and without any attempt at nationalism, Foster wrote into his simple and poignant songs the flavor and characteristic traits peculiar to America,” finally concluding that “his genius still shines like a star in the firmament.”<sup>46</sup>

Howard and Bellows have a muddled view of folk music that is not in agreement with earlier or later historians of American vernacular music. They make the claim that New England is the ultimate source for the American folk music tradition, despite the fact that they already admitted the music of New England is swept aside at the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>47</sup> Furthermore the authors attribute the sources of American folk music to completely British origins, despite already specifying

---

44 Ibid, 107.

45 Ibid, 114.

46 Ibid, 106-107.

47 Ibid, 313.

that the African tradition is the precise ingredient that produces uniquely American music.<sup>48</sup> By using the term “British” the reader can assume the authors' meant English, Welsh and Scottish and perhaps Irish traditions, however, in addition to leaving out African influence, they ignore the German and Scandinavian traditions. Additionally this is the only work that attributes contemporary event in Europe to the rise of American folk music, usually viewed as the result of native impetus. The authors attribute the renewed interest in folk music to the rise of nationalism in Europe after Napoleon causing renewed interest in ethnic folk traditions in Europe, trickling down to the United States around the time of the Civil War.<sup>49</sup> The volume extends the already acknowledged domineering influence of European music in the 19<sup>th</sup> century to American folk tradition undermining the perceived independent development of folk that many historians cherish. Lastly the authors subjugate folk music to high-art, claiming that folk music's most important contributions are to composers of high art who use folk traditions as inspiration.<sup>50</sup>

Moving into the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Howard and Bellows end their work with ragtime, the blues and jazz which they describe as musical forms stemming from African American and White American folk music. Remember, however, that the authors already distinguished between African and African American folk music as the latter being essentially European. Ragtime is the earliest of the three genres, which is considered, “the most revolutionary musical force that had yet come out of America.”<sup>51</sup> This implies that the influence of American ragtime is more significant to the rest of the world than the previously covered minstrel shows. This is sound in judgment and agreed upon by other historians, as minstrel shows fell out of favor and ragtime continues to influence popular music to this day. Howard and Bellows quickly transition into jazz which overcomes ragtime in its significance. Jazz

---

48 Ibid, 316-317.

49 Ibid, 175.

50 Ibid, 312.

51 Ibid, 193.

is ultimately America's "greatest contribution to twentieth-century music."<sup>52</sup> While Stephen Foster is their quintessential American composer, jazz takes the honor being Howard and Bellows's most American music genre: "nothing could have better expressed to the whole world the spirit of the American people."<sup>53</sup>

The historiography transitioning into the 1960's really does not deviate far from Howard and Bellows, perhaps only become more detailed in on the points where earlier historians lacked clarity. Irving Sablosky's, *American Music*, (1969) is a good example typical to the time. Sablosky actually regresses in the pattern established so far and dedicates the greater portion of his volume to the high-art music forms, like opera and classical music, even admitting later that these forms have fallen into disuse among Americans. Despite his observation that most Americans do not listen to high-art, his view throughout the work is that vernacular music is important because that it inspires high-art, having no merit otherwise.

Howard and Bellows portray music as art imitating life, however, Sablosky states in the preface that this is not the approach he is going to take in this work, rather American history and American art flow in and out with one another simultaneously.<sup>54</sup> Upfront the author gives his definition of what constitutes American music and sets it apart from other traditions; he claims that American music by principal will always be the product of at least two forces. Reading this one assumes the author means two cultures combining musical styles, however, his first identified meeting of two forces is the Pilgrims with the land of New England.<sup>55</sup> While earlier historians referenced the Puritans Sablosky decided to start history right at the beginning of the Plymouth colony, despite the fact that very little evidence exists that the Pilgrims, actually called the Separatists, had any musical tradition whatsoever,

---

52 Ibid, 196.

53 Ibid, 193.

54 Irving Sablosky, *American Music* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1969) x.

55 Ibid, 3.

different from the rest of England. This does not matter to the author because if Plymouth is the beginning of the United States, as it was once seen, then the American musical tradition must have some connection to the colony. William Billings here, again, is the greatest composer to come out of the Puritan tradition, but the author falls short of declaring him the first *American* composer, rather Billings is the first composer to have hints of individualism that later made the cornerstone of American music.<sup>56</sup> Billings and Puritanism both recede from being the foundation of American music to being precursors to a future vernacular tradition.

“Negro” music is essentially “white man's” music with an indeterminable amount of African influence.<sup>57</sup> Taking this position allowed the author to agree with the earlier historiography and side step the issue of how much African tradition became part of American folk music. Sablosky then uses the same geographic principal applied to the Puritans on the African slaves, asserting that Negro spirituals were a unique creation of the South, as nowhere else in the world did the conditions exist to produce it.<sup>58</sup> This view is valid in two ways: first lyrically the themes of the spirituals reflected the conditions of the unique institution of American brand slavery and secondly: the mark of European influence (however much or little) on both the lyrics and music. While it appears that the author is setting up another volume minimizing African American contribution to vernacular tradition, he departs from the earlier historiography and identifies the Negro spiritual as the first “wholly new” American genre.<sup>59</sup>

Sablosky characterizes much of the 19<sup>th</sup> American composition in America as direct product of contemporary European movements and inferior in quality.<sup>60</sup> No one throughout the historiography

---

56 Ibid, 13.

57 Ibid, 43.

58 Ibid.

59 Ibid.

60 Ibid, 51.

ever comes to the defense of this era in American vernacular or high-art music, to assign it of any artistic or cultural value. From a teleological perspective this period is almost as lost on American traditions as the earlier Puritan, so if value is assigned by influence, it is a harsh but sound conclusion reached by historians. The author explains that without a real American tradition at this time immigrants from Europe largely found their own ethnic music preserved in the areas their nationalities tended to concentrate.<sup>61</sup>

The first truly American genre in this volume is minstrel music; according to the author is “a genuine and original expression of expanding America.”<sup>62</sup> The text never clarifies this statement, as the last volume explained that black face entertainment in general is the story of African exploitation, rather this author ties minstrelsy to some vague connection to westward expansion. He does shift the tone of his assessment and admits that minstrel music was essential white people singing white music they believed black people sang.<sup>63</sup> Not to say that minstrel tradition isn't indebted to African American music rather that, much like the racist caricatures employed in minstrel acts the music is also a product of white observation made into humor.

Following the rise of black face minstrelsy, the author has the most eloquent assessment of the influence on the Civil War on vernacular music yet found in the historiography. The Civil War created a block of European influence and allowed “scattered musical energies that had been expanding themselves haphazardly...came to be focused and consolidated in institutions of American stamp and scope.”<sup>64</sup> With the rise of a new United States after the war the many isolated vernacular traditions began to blend together and create national traditions, following in the place of minstrel music. There is

---

61 Ibid, 55.

62 Ibid, 58.

63 Ibid, 112.

64 Ibid, 84.

an odd absence of any mention of Stephen Foster in this work, which is surprising considering the immortal status other historians attribute to his work and legacy.

The tone of the text shifts considerably at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Sablosky claims that a growing divide between high-art and popular/folk music begins at this time because composers lacked American “musical vernacular.”<sup>65</sup> According to the author, the period of 1910-1929 is a turning point in American music, before this time American music was mostly German and English in style, now the addition of African American influence signaled a complete paradigm shift.<sup>66</sup> It was World War One that certainly ended the German influence on American music as even German immigrants tried to hide their heritage.<sup>67</sup>

Then as the text moves beyond World War One the odd claim is made that the music industry took up an “enterprise and missionary spirit.”<sup>68</sup> This is perhaps an attempt to link the spirit of the new vernacular traditions to the legendary Puritan origin of American music. The rest of the volume is dedicated to jazz and folk music, without regard to rock n' roll because not enough time elapsed in the rock movement to make sound historical judgments about the origin and direction of the tradition. The author specifies that New Orleans is the general area where ragtime and jazz emanate, and that it is essentially a mixture of African, Caribbean and European styles.<sup>69</sup> Lastly the author examines the curious movements within folk music, which first became popular (as *folk* music) during the depression, but after World War two became a music of study for the elites, then by the 1960's became a form of popular music.<sup>70</sup> In the span of thirty years the American folk music manages to start as a

---

65 Ibid, 110.

66 Ibid, 135.

67 Ibid, 136.

68 Ibid, 136.

69 Ibid, 116.

70 Ibid, 178.

grassroots movement, become part of the musically elite and then end up being pop music. This final thought breaks down some of the perceived barriers between the labels put on American music as any genre can quickly move between, folk, popular and high- art forms of music.

Daniel Kingman's, *American Music: A Panorama*, (1973) is the result of the shifting priorities toward populism brought about by the 1960's, finally showing in the historiography. It firmly has one foot in the tradition of the earlier histories however the differences here set the pattern for the rest of the large, "shot-gun" volumes into the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Folk music is the first subject of the book, while the entire history of American music is covered first; the classical and other high-art music forms are placed in the back as a separate tradition.<sup>71</sup> Kingman argues at the very beginning of his work that because the United States is such a young nation the popular forms of music are closer to the folk traditions, accordingly he believes the collective folk music of mixed European and African heritage to be the most import and most American genre.<sup>72</sup>

Kingman ignores the Puritans altogether and focuses on the wider British tradition that would serve as the common backdrop in all the colonies.<sup>73</sup> Ignoring the Puritans is the first major separation of American music history from the wholesome religious origins that scholars wanted so desperately to be at the core of cultural heritage. Kingman establishes his view of African American tradition that firmly the consensus among music historian right into the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Previous historians denied that African music styles had anything but the slightest and indirect influence on African American music. Here the author identifies certain elements of African American music that is explicitly African in origin, and unlike other historian actually gives examples: rhythm, the kinetic experience, percussion

---

71 Daniel Kingman, *American Music: A Panorama* (New York City: Schirmer Books, 1973) 1.

72 Ibid, 1.

73 Ibid, 3.

and call-and-response.<sup>74</sup> African syncopation of rhythm, creating a dragging effect in music, is the basis of ragtime; it literally is the ragging of the normal steady European beat. These qualities apply to most vernacular music of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The author specifies that concerning the blues, the music is very African in origin, but the individuality expressed both in the solo performances and the lyrics of the artists is particularly American, as Native African styles tends to be a group activity and ritual.<sup>75</sup>

Beside the African and European traditions, Kingman includes Latin and Native American music. Consistent with the historiography Kingman asserts that, with the exception of oriental music, “no music has had less influence” on American popular and folk music than the traditions of the Native Americans.<sup>76</sup> Latin music, on the other hand, Kingman states is ignored by historians and as evidence he references salsa, the tango, and the many other popular Latin dances that brought their own rhythms into American popular music and are often used without knowledge of their origins.<sup>77</sup> Other historians have included a reference to Latin, Caribbean or Spanish music in passing, but Kingman demonstrates an unprecedented amount of depth in his details, especially when a subject might be controversial.

Redressing folk music, Kingman notices the same shift in musical tastes in the 20<sup>th</sup> century that previous historians have mentioned in association with a growing divide between high-art and vernacular music, or the anti-German nativists. Kingman explains that the 20<sup>th</sup> century saw a musical explosion of uniquely American varieties because of the renewed exposure of rural to urban and white to black influences.<sup>78</sup> He also makes the observation that folk, in several forms, paradoxically becomes pop music as various point.<sup>79</sup> After this section of the text the whole volume curtails into

---

74 Ibid , 28-29.

75 Ibid, 43.

76 Ibid, 55.

77 Ibid, 74.

78 Ibid, 85.

79 Ibid, 97.

disorganization, but nonetheless, has a few points worth mentioning.

For some reason, despite doing away with the Puritans, Kingman goes back to the time of the American Revolution, to William Billings who he labels as the first American composer<sup>80</sup> Again, in line with his predecessors Kingman confirms that 19<sup>th</sup> century American popular and high-art music just mirrored contemporary European music.<sup>81</sup> However, the traditions in rural areas and the west remained disconnected from new European influences and these sources form the basis for 20<sup>th</sup> century music.<sup>82</sup> The two big genres coming out of the South according to Kinman is county music and the blues. Country and blues are the two sons of the South compared to the biblical Ishmael and Isaac, “half brothers” with many differences, as well as, similarities, ultimately converging to create rock n' roll.<sup>83</sup> Jimmie Rodgers is country music’s first international star, he argues making the genre go from folk to popular.<sup>84</sup> The biggest country star, falling in to the same outlaw tradition as Rodgers is Hank Williams Sr., the later historiography almost unanimously agrees on this point, with the occasional exception made for Johnny Cash.<sup>85</sup> This is the first instance so far where a historian considered country music influential enough to go into depth on the foundations and ongoing legacy of its performers. He defends his predecessors by pointing out that the national popularity of country music is one of the surprises of the century as it became popular relatively late compared to other forms, like jazz. With some uncertainty, he does not want to be held completely to this statement, Kingman writes that country music is the nearest thing we have to a “people's music.”<sup>86</sup> Country is a popular form, but does

---

80 Ibid, 116.

81 Ibid, 132.

82 Ibid, 133.

83 Ibid, 171.

84 Ibid, 183.

85 Ibid, 187.

86 Ibid, 173.

stress the need to be authentic in performance, true to life, which is a folk music tradition, so as far as pop music is concerned it does seek to address populists issue more consistently than competing popular genres. Since the 1960's this has leaned toward reflecting conservative American culture.

Kingman attributes the differences between country and rock to an urban-rural divide.<sup>87</sup> Other historians stress the African American invention for rock music as the main source of difference; however, Kingman points out the significant influence of African American performers have had on the country music genre. He ultimately concludes that the African American musical tradition as formed in the United States plays a dominate role in American popular music. While he began the book indicating that folk music is the most important genre, he then indicates that country music might be the most American and then transitions into the high-art portion of his work with jazz which he claims is unclassifiable: being popular, folk and classical, it is “the single most distinctive American music.”<sup>88</sup>

While Kingman loses focus with the progression of his chapter he does establish some new ground that becomes the standard for later historians. Kingman gives scholarly attention to Native American music. Although he concludes like the other historians that native music exists in an unconnected tradition from the main British-African core of American vernacular music. He also makes a strong argument that Latin-American influences are largely overlooked, especially with jazz and dance music. His to most important contributions to the historiography is perhaps his coverage of “Ishmael” and “Isaac”: by shifting the focus away from the Puritans, he makes the South the real center of development. His assertion that African American musical forms retained significant portions of its African roots becomes the popular view. The amount of space he expends on country music is also the beginning of a trend, as later historians tend to push jazz out of the picture and embrace country music as the national tradition.

---

87 Ibid, 216.

88 Ibid, 351.

## **The Sniper Rifles**

The newer histories labeled “the sniper rifles” aim to find the essential or representative core of American vernacular music that culminates the entire American experience. This newer form is more prone to disagreement and there is not a smooth development between generations like that in the large “shot gun” volumes. One discernible chronological pattern is the ever shrinking center that historians, musicologist and journalists feel comfortable labeling as *thee* essential American music. This shrinking tendency begins with shortening the time line, and restricting the genres, to arguing that one singular artist is the embodiment of the entire nation. It is in these more recent attempts not to cover everything American, but rather the *most* American, that the literature has opened up to less than reputable authors, for scholarly study. However, there exist a number of historians who insist that their view of the American center is correct. This second group of books tends to be more interesting because the authors are passionate about their subjects, whereas the large volumes try to cover every genre regardless of the writer’s actual interests and often the major themes established toward the beginning are lost. These “sniper” histories have well defined arguments and focus exclusively on proving their thesis.

The first of this second group is Alec Wilder's, *American Popular Song: The Great Innovators*, (1972). Wilder argues that individuals make American music what it is not large ethnic traditions mixing without consciousness development.<sup>89</sup> In this work he focuses on composers as the minds behind the distinctly American traditions, the real driving force at the center of the music.<sup>90</sup> In a radical move Wilder, does not discuss, William Billings, or the Puritan or anyone except Stephen Foster until the year 1885.<sup>91</sup> This late date is when Wilder recognizes the development of American music in

---

<sup>89</sup> Alec Wilder, *American Popular Song: The Great Innovators, 1900-1950* (New York City: Oxford University Press, 1972) xxvi.

<sup>90</sup> Ibid, xxviii

<sup>91</sup> Ibid, xxix.

distinct separation from developments in Europe. He chooses all of his composers based on their “American-ness” which is characterized by a sense of individuality, value if freedoms, certain morals and deficits, among other qualifications.<sup>92</sup>

Surprisingly Wilder overlooks black-face minstrelsy, perhaps out of shame as a mark against the American character he is trying to extoll in his work. He nonetheless asserts Stephen Foster created the “first truly American” compositions as influenced by English and Negro music.<sup>93</sup> Foster is the first American composer, however, here he is treated like Billings in earlier histories, being characterized as the lone American in his generation: a precursor to later development. Wilder considers Irving Berlin to be the greatest American composer, encompassing many American vernacular traditions.<sup>94</sup> He continues in his praise of Berlin claiming that, everything Berlin composed was American in one respect or another.<sup>95</sup> He writes that Berlin is always American, because he draws from every American folk and pop tradition.<sup>96</sup> By using the full spectrum of American vernacular music Berlin's compositions earn him the title of being, “the best all-around, over-all song writer America has ever had.”<sup>97</sup>

Wilder's focused attention to composer continues until the 1950's where, instead of fading out like other historian, he specifies that rock n' roll is the dividing line in popular music, and is extremely important, however, not enough time have passed to gain an accurate assessment of the composers of the era.<sup>98</sup> This work is in between the two varieties of histories as it attempts to take a wide view, but

---

92 Ibid, 292.

93 Ibid, 3.

94 Ibid, 91.

95 Ibid, 94.

96 Ibid, 119.

97 Ibid, 120.

98 Ibid, xxvii.

creates narrow parameters for what is important. The work also stresses the role of the composer as the main creative force behind American vernacular music. Then he isolates Foster and Berlin as part of a special core that is undeniably American.

A later work, Bill C. Malone's, *Southern Music / American Music*, (1979), argues that the Southern United States is the real center of American music. According to Malone the South shapes, "the entire realm of America's popular music."<sup>99</sup> The South specifically is the source of American music because it is where African and British music style experience the earliest, most intense and continuous amount of interaction.<sup>100</sup> In addition to British and African the author acknowledges the many other ethnic traditions from Latin American and Europe that play into the creating American music.<sup>101</sup> Malone argues that the mixing of traditions is so thorough that it is actually "next to impossible" to distinguish the racial source of Southern music.<sup>102</sup> This statement allows Malone to attach every ethnic tradition in the United States to nearly any genre he sees fit, and so built in a mechanism by which he can serve his thesis by his own logic.

Malone, by focusing on the South makes no mention of the Puritans or Williams Billings, rather black-face minstrelsy is the first American music.<sup>103</sup> Although he just claimed that the origins of American genres are almost impossible to draw back to ethnic origins he states that black-face directly borrowed from African American plantation tradition and used British tradition, along with the lesser influence of German, Scottish and Irish music.<sup>104</sup> From this point on Malone's argument is very

---

99 Bill C. Malone, *Southern Music / American Music* (Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 1979), 2.

100 Ibid, 3.

101 Ibid, 4.

102 Ibid, 5.

103 Ibid, 19.

104 Ibid, 19-20.

persuasive and organized. Nearly every vernacular American music genre up to the time of 1979 is Southern at its very source: country, folk, bluegrass, blues, ragtime, minstrel, jazz, swing, western swing, rockabilly, rock n' roll, zydeco, rhythm and blues, gospel and soul. Malone is quick to point out that Woody Guthrie self-identified as a hillbilly artist, to connect the Northern liberal folk movement to Southern tradition.<sup>105</sup>

By limiting the geography in his argument, Malone actually has a more coherent thesis and organization than those attempting to cover everything remotely American. He also shifts completely away from New England and high-art music forms, which are simply vacant from the entirety of the work. African Americans play a prominent role as characters in the American story with agency in their cultural contribution, instead of merely being pushed into one condition or unknowingly influencing a white composer at some later time. Despite the momentum toward trading high culture for folk traditions the professional historians writing in the “sniper” style produce the better arguments.

From selective geography and professions, many historians start to publish works on one specific genre, claiming their single genre, is the quintessential, unquestionable, center of American vernacular music. Examples, of these are abundant as every historian focusing on a narrow strain of American music, is going to stress the unique importance of their chosen scope. One example is Kip Lornell's, *Introducing American Folk Music*, (1993) wherein the author argues that folk music is the basis of all American music.<sup>106</sup> Lornell admits to being bias toward English language music, however, the book does include Cajun, Hawaiian and native American chapters more as an appendix to the main African-British story line than anything else.<sup>107</sup> By encompassing his definition of American folk to include many isolated traditions, not normally considered part of the African-European dynamic, Lornell is defining his own parameters from which it is easiest to prove his thesis. If Lornell includes,

---

105 Ibid, 151.

106 Kip Lornell, *Introducing American Folk Music* (Indiapolis: Brown and Benchmark Publishers, 1993), vii.

107 Ibid, 9.

everyone's folk tradition into his interpretation of folk music, the hardest part of the argument remaining is attaching folk music to popular music, which is already a consistent theme in the historiography. An example of this game of favorites can be found with most American vernacular traditions and each of the large “shot gun” volumes already had within them this pattern of singular exultation.

This concentration on a single genre as *thee* American genre continues right into the 21<sup>st</sup> century, a unique example being Don Cusic's, *Baseball and Country Music*, and (2003). Like argument in this work is clear and restated in every chapter, “nothing is more quintessentially American than baseball and country music.”<sup>108</sup> Cusic incorporates baseball and country together, with a paralleled history throughout the book, constituting the core of American values and struggles especially throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century, “each is supremely American, and each represents a unique history of American.”<sup>109</sup>

Like with the other “sniper” historians, in order to include the most amount of Americans into his exclusive core he expands the definition of “country music” beyond its conventional use. For example, to Cusic, Stephen Foster is the first country music writer.<sup>110</sup> This is a complete anachronism: the term “country music” in its current context (1950's to present) is really a separation from “country-western,” which is itself is a combination of “cowboy” music and “hillbilly” music. Cusic glosses over this fact reasoning that Foster is more akin to country music than any other genre. Next Cusic addresses the hillbilly distinction and is correct when he states that country music (by his definition) was integrated before record companies made the “race” and “hillbilly” distinctions in the early 20<sup>th</sup>

---

108 Don Cusic, *Baseball and Country Music* ( Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2003) 139.

109 Ibid, 3.

110 Ibid, 10.

century.<sup>111</sup> Before record companies shaped genres in order to establish, specific marketable sounds for target customers, the rural southern traditions, were not racially segregated, although variation certainly existed.

With both English White American and African Americans integrated into country music includes Latino culture with emphasis on the Latin participation in country tradition in Texas.<sup>112</sup> With these three ethnic groups the wide majority of Americans are thrown into the country mix. Cusic is really referencing folk music in much of the earlier portions of the book. However, like with Stephen Foster, he argues that country music at the time of publication, shared the greatest affinity and the strongest ties to the wide spread strata of folk music traditions across ethnicity, locales and time. In this way Cusic turns his biggest weakness into his greatest strength if the reader so chooses to go along with his definition of country music. If country really is Stephen Foster, Woody Guthrie, Mexican cowboys, Appalachian, slick city singers like Jim Reeves, settlers and African American troubadours, then yes country music, along with baseball, represents the quintessential America. The reader needs to accept that country music, which includes the current top 40, is roughly analogous to what other historians identify as folk music; most of the historians in this historiography would reject this view.

Still progressing forward, some scholars are so bold as to identify a single individual as possessing the essential spirit of American like none other. Many biographers will validate their subjects with bold statements about their centrality in American vernacular music, this is abundantly clear in nearly every book on Elvis Presley. However, there exists academic works examining the celebrity of an individual as a microcosm of the whole American experience. Surprisingly these works can be very convincing, especially if the reader is inclined toward the subject. One of the best and most recent examples is Leigh H Edwards, *Johnny Cash and the paradox of American Identity*, (2009). Edwards makes a case for Johnny Cash in much the same way as Cusic does for baseball and country

---

111 Ibid, 131.

112 Ibid, 144.

music, basically drawing every segment of American possible to the subject. Edwards reaches deeper than Cusic drawing in demographics, but also movements and experiences. Johnny Cash at some point in his life, he subsumes, America Protestantism, youth culture in the 1950's, 90's and 2000's, a source of American masculinity, American patriotism, the Great Depression, Christian Zionism, the "Old West," drug culture, prisoners, the plight of the Native Americans, gangster rap artists, rock, folk, bluegrass, pop, and alternative music genres, the poor, the farmer, hippies, Gothic subculture and emo subculture.<sup>113</sup> Edward argues that the tragedies and struggles in Johnny Cash's personal life, which he always incorporated into part of his image, resonates across wide segments of Americans over the length of his career, and now legacy. Johnny Cash is like many special historical figures like Spartacus who we mold to fit our modern needs. Cusic fails to provide the depth that Edwards has in abundance, focusing on a single person. Despite a hesitation to admit it, this book is very persuasive, and under the condition that only one solitary person in American vernacular music can be selected to represent the core values and tribulations of America, it may just be Johnny Cash.

Over about a century of the historiography, there is a plethora of shifting priorities, approaches, and opinions on American Vernacular music. Turning the historiography on itself, the only common theme between every text examined is that American vernacular music has some connection to English folk music. This English connection does not leave much that the very first histories did not already establish. However, the emerging patterns are more helpful than a cross generational consensus. There are number of important ideas concerning American vernacular music that emerge through the progression of the historiography.

It is the unique meeting of African and European music within a system of racially based chattel slavery, as could only happen in the American South that produces the basis for creating uniquely American music. Historians have progressed toward recognizing the continuity and influence of

---

113 Leigh H Edwards, *Johnny Cash and the paradox of American Identity* (Bloomington; University of Indiana

Press, 2009).

African American traditions on American culture. Following the acknowledgment of African contributions, other non-European ethnicities are gaining recognition. The folk music of Native American, however, throughout the historiography is always a separate, but genuinely American music tradition. Native Americans use their music to remain unique in the face of cultural assimilation.

Throughout the progression of the historiography the earliest authors ignore vernacular music altogether, then slowly recognize the importance of folk and popular music, eventually overtaking the high-art forms in significance. Also the larger volumes eventually increase in size out of necessity, of including everything American, for as recent as academically possible. These volumes become cumbersome and the themes laid out in the prefaces fall apart toward the end. The later tradition of historian searching for the essential center of American vernacular music, are better organized and ultimately more compelling.

The disagreements between historians are the greatest resource in the historiography, for application in the social studies classroom. Students, exposed to the history of “Yankee Doodle” can debate within the class, whether it is an American or British song. The ethics of black-face minstrelsy is also a good social studies subject that can be extrapolated to current events. If the historiography demonstrates anything it is that the United States is rich in its diversity, which may be the most American feature of American vernacular music.

## Bibliography

- Chase, Gilbert. *America's Music: From the Pilgrims to the Present*. Chicago: University of Illinois, 1987.
- Crawford, Richard. *America's Musical Life: A History*. New York City: WW Norton and Company, 2001.
- Cusic, Don. *Baseball and Country Music*. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2003.
- Edwards, Leigh H. *Johnny Cash and the paradox of American Identity*. Bloomington; University of Indiana Press, 2009.
- Elson, Louis C. *American Music*. New York City: The Macmillan Company, 1915.
- Hitchcock, H. Wiley. *Music in the United States: A Historical Introduction*. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall, 2000.
- Howard, John Tasker; Bellows, George Kent. *A Short History of Music in America*. New York City: Thomas Y. Crowell Company, 1957.
- Kingman, Daniel. *American Music: A Panorama*. New York City: Schirmer Books, 1973.
- Lornell, Kip. *Introducing American Folk Music*. Indianapolis: Brown and Benchmark Publishers, 1993.
- Malone, Bill C. *Southern Music / American Music*. Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 1979.
- Sablosky, Irving. *American Music*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1969.
- Sanjek, Russell. *American Popular Music and its Business: The First Four Hundred Years The Beginning to 1790*. New York, Oxford University Press, 1988.
- Spaeth, Sigmund. *A History of Popular Music in America*. New York City: Random House, 1948.
- Wilder, Alec. *American Popular Song: The Great Innovators, 1900-1950*. New York City: Oxford University Press, 1972.

Eric Yanis

Thesis Part

II

“See you Later Alligator”: The Hidden Multilingual American Music tradition

While doing a historiography of American Vernacular music a major theme emerged between every diverse script covering a century of scholarship that the language of American music is English. This attitude is the outgrowth of the 18<sup>th</sup> and early 19<sup>th</sup> century view that American Vernacular music is essentially an English-Scottish tradition, and is further perpetuated by the more recent view of American Vernacular music as primarily the creation of Anglo-American and Afro-American traditions. Both the older and newer consensus view supports the notion that to be “American” music it has to be in English. As a result, the historiography largely ignores the possibility that music in other languages could be also American, however, I argue that this is a gross simplification unbecoming of representing the modern American landscape, radio waves and our diverse classrooms. Using Spanish, Cajun and Hawaiian language music examples, I argue that English is not the only language central to the development of American Vernacular music and that a wider view is necessary to promote the appreciation of true diversity found throughout the great expanse of the United States.

### **Reexamining the Historiography**

To demonstrate the gross under appreciation of American music in languages other than English, I reexamined the sources explicitly discussed in the historiography isolating all portions that were about Spanish, French or Hawaiian language music. The portions selected mentioned music in these languages that were of American creation, not including, for example references to Spanish music made in Spain by a Spaniard, but rather Spanish language music made in California by a Chicano. The following table records the results of this study.

	Spanish	French	Hawaiian	Book	Pages
Hitchcock				0	394
Sablosky	3	6		0	185
Howard and Bellows	3	1		2	400
Cusic	1	0		0	146
Lornell	2	7		4	244
Malone	4	5		1	155
Chase	1	1		0	636
Wilder	6	5		0	519
Edwards	0	0		0	189
Elson	1	6		0	366
Kingman	16	7		0	411
TOTALS	41	38		7	3645

Pages about topic 86  
total pages 3645  
Percent of Coverage <2.35%

As shown above the 11 texts that were covered in the historiography totaled 3,645 pages, not counting indexes, bibliography and the rest of this sort. Only 86 of these pages had references to American music based in these languages, most references did not fill the entire page, so to conclude that only 2.35% of the entire historiography had any content related to music in languages other than English is the extreme upper limit. I searched for a trend to see if the inclusion of languages increased in content with the passing of time among these publication, however, found no such trend exists. This lack of recognition of the wider vision of

---

<sup>1</sup> Louis C. Elson, *American Music* (New York City: The Macmillan Company, 1915) . ; Sigmund Spaeth, (New York City: Random House, 1948) . ; John Tasker Howard, George Kent Bellows, *A Short History of Music in America* (New York City: Thomas Y. Crowell Company, 1957).; Daniel Kingman, *American Music: A Panorama* (New York City: Schirmer Books, 1973).; Alec Wilder, *American Popular Song: The Great Innovators, 1900-1950* (New York City: Oxford University Press, 1972). Bill C. Malone, *Southern Music / American Music* (Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 1979),. Kip Lornell, *Introducing American Folk Music* (Indiapolis: Brown and Benchmark Publishers, 1993) . ; Don Cusic, *Baseball and Country Music* ( Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2003) . ; Leigh H Edwards, *Johnny Cash and the paradox of American Identity* (Bloomington; University of Indiana Press, 2009).

American Vernacular music is unwarranted against the body evidence to the contrary demonstrating that American music has a multilingual heritage.

### **French Language Music: Cajun and Zydeco**

The historiography of American Vernacular music largely considers the music created by the Cajuns and Creoles of Louisiana to be an insular tradition, much like Native American music, without much interaction with the larger American musical culture.<sup>2</sup> For this reason, the Cajun and Zydeco music created by Americans within the United States is largely ignored in the narrative of American music history. However, not only is this music a product of constant interaction with English language American music, but is itself a unique American creation that could not have arisen in any other country, the same as jazz, country and rock.

The term “Cajun” is a corruption of the word Acadian and the process by which the Acadian people became Cajun is a story of adversity, colonialism, deportation, enslavement, geography and multicultural exchange that could only happen on the American continent.<sup>3</sup> Established in 1605 the colony of Acadia grew to encompass parts of Northern Maine and Nova Scotia, in effect, the Acadians settled within the modern boundaries of the United States before the foundation of the colony of Jamestown.<sup>4</sup> The first French settlers in Acadia, almost totally isolated from other French populations quickly married into Native American tribes.<sup>5</sup> The colony plunged itself into a largely undocumented five year civil war unsupervised by French authorities and by 1654 ended up in English possession.<sup>6</sup> Acadia became a pawn of the British

---

2 Ryan Brasseux, *Cajun Breakdown: the emergence of American-made music* (NYC: Oxford University Press, 2009) 4.

3 Jean Daigle ed., *The Acadians of the Maritimes: Thematic Studies* (Moncton, Centre d'etudes, 1982) 18,

4 Daigle ed., *The Acadians*, 19.

5 Daigle ed., *The Acadians*, 20.

6 Daigle ed., *The Acadians*, 22.

and French empires and often changed hands because of wars fought elsewhere over colonies. While in English possession Acadia lost all contact with other French populations and the English forbid further French immigration to Acadia.<sup>7</sup> The geographical and legal isolation and heavy intermarriage with Natives created a unique American history and people, who came to develop a policy of neutrality with Native, French or English powers, because they could not identify themselves with any of these cultures.<sup>8</sup>

During the 18<sup>th</sup> century conflicts between England and France, that shaped the development of the United States also led to the destruction of Acadia and forced exodus of thousands. The Acadians, being of French origin, were always held suspect by England. The English, owning Acadia at during the middle 18<sup>th</sup> century were afraid that the Acadians would rebel in support of French interests despite their policy of neutrality. In 1755, with tensions building between France and England, the English expelled the Acadians.<sup>9</sup> 10,000 of 13,000 Acadians were deported and the remainder avoided deportation only by hiding in the countryside (Those who were left behind were the source of a French folk traditions found in Maine). The English distributed the Acadians throughout their North American colonies (except for Virginia) hoping they would assimilate like the Huguenot immigrants. 1/3 of the Acadians died on the transport ships by disease and some ended up back into the mother country of France.<sup>10</sup> By far the most significant location of these Acadians was to Louisiana, which at the time was owned by the Spanish, it was here that the Acadians became Cajuns.

---

7 Daigle ed., *The Acadians*, 23.

8 Daigle ed., *The Acadians*, 18.

9 Daigle ed., *The Acadians*, 45.

10 Ibid.

When the isolated Acadians resettled in Louisiana they interacted with the local Creole, African American, Anglo-American and Spanish/Hispanic populations and the history of the the Cajuns is anything but insular, as the historiography suggests, as the musical styles known today as Cajun and Zydeco are products of the multicultural American landscape and would not exist had the Cajuns retreated from their surroundings as insinuated. In fact, ever since the arrival of the Acadians the preexisting slave-owning French aristocracy of Louisiana considers the Acadians inferior to themselves and not truly French.<sup>11</sup> The music of the “Acadians” turned “Cajuns”, became simply known as cajun music, whereas the music of the Creoles of Louisiana became known as Zydeco. Much like how race created genre barriers in the English speaking United States the Cajun/Creoles experienced the same separation despite both being sung in French dialects.<sup>12</sup> The mirroring image of race relations between Anglo-American And Franco-American spheres is another testament of the frailty of the supposed language barrier that segregates “Americanness” to the English speaking portions of our history. The Cajuns also experienced the same varieties of discrimination by the dominant Anglo-American majority that we associate with other American minorities.<sup>13</sup> For example, when Louisiana passed compulsory education laws, English only instruction forced the Cajuns and Creoles to learn English and speaking a French dialect was punishable by beatings and restricted bathrooms privileges.<sup>14</sup>

From its inception Cajun music is often defined as a heterogeneous mix of, “Acadian, French, Creole, Celtic and Anglo-Saxon folksongs,” the creole portion denoting Afro-Caribbean

---

11 Kingman, *American Music*, 596.

12 John Broven, *South to Louisiana: the Music of the Cajun Bayous* (Gretna: Pelican Publishing Company, 1983), 4.

13 Brasseux, *Cajun Breakdown*, xi.

14 Ibid, xi, 99.

and Latin antecedents.<sup>15</sup> The same seminal influences helped foster English language American Vernacular music, in many of the same locales, Cajun music is the response of the French speaking population interacting with the geographic and social landscape of America. The Creole counterpart of Cajun music is Zydeco. Haitian Creoles came to Louisiana as slaves to wealthy French landowners (not the Cajuns) and this is when the Afro-Caribbean and French traditions inter-meshed and the Creoles created the dance music known as zydeco.<sup>16</sup> Again, the racial division in music genres is the French equivalent of the English separation of White folk music, called “Hillbilly” by record companies, and African American music, first recorded as “race records.”<sup>17</sup>

Cajun and Zydeco, while of close relation, have differences stemming from the use of music within their respective cultures.<sup>18</sup> The practitioners of Zydeco are African Creoles and their roots in the Caribbean give Zydeco a Spanish influence, not as a later flavoring but as an ingredient in the formation of the genre itself, as will be shown with English language American Vernacular music, the Spanish language traditions are so rudimentary to American music is it hard to isolate the influence as the American listener is accustomed to hearing it to the point of not recognizing it. Zydeco also has a relation to African-American blues and folk music developed in the English Speaking portions of Louisiana and Mississippi sharing an emphasis on dance and the use of improvisation (in comparison to European music of any language).<sup>19</sup> Not mentioned in the historiography is the fact that Zydeco grew in influence beyond the Louisiana

---

15 Broven, *South to Louisiana*, 9.

16 Ibid, 101.

17 Don Cusic, *Baseball and Country Music* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2003) 131.

18 Desmond A Jolly, “Zydeco and Cajun-Music From Francophone America.” *Multicultural Perspectives* 2, no. 3 (July 2000): 25–26. doi:10.1207/S15327892MCP0203\_06, 25.

19 Ibid, 26.

Creoles and became part of African American folk traditions evident in the music of many seminal performers of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, such as, Leadbelly, Lightnin' Hopkins, T-Bone Walker and Lonnie Johnson.<sup>20</sup> While for many today, these artists are buried in history they each were giants in influence across American music: Leadbelly, as promoted by John Lomax, is the first national personality in American folk music, while Hopkins, Walker and Johnson were Blues-men, all of which had a direct influence on American and British rock music.

While Creole-Zydeco discoursed with African-American Folk music, Cajun music did the same with White-American Folk/Hillbilly music. This common racial trend demonstrates that the language barrier is far less significant than previously thought of in the historiography and the shared tendency toward segregation, perhaps better than anything else, demonstrates that the French Language music of the Cajuns and Creoles is an inclusive part of American music tradition and not isolates. Early Cajun folk songs, like their English language counterparts, were often played without knowledge of who composed the song originally, instead, the American folk tradition before copy-write laws held these songs as communal possessions, without definitive form as anyone could alter a song accordingly.<sup>21</sup> An English language example of this common American tradition is the song "House of the rising sun," (later covered by the Animals), which is set in New Orleans and circulated among Louisiana folk singers, the most famous of which being the previously mention Leadbelly. While written in the first person and very individualistic, the author of "House of the rising sun" is unknown, and the versions are so diverse it is unlikely that any one person could receive credit, truly a property of the commons.

---

20 Ibid, 104.

21 Ibid, 18.

French-language Cajun music developed alongside of English-Language Hillbilly music, both greatly influencing one another.<sup>22</sup> Early 20<sup>th</sup> century Cajun folk singers were recorded by the same companies recording English language folk music labels, such as, Columbia, Decca, Bluebird and Okeh.<sup>23</sup> The commercialization of both the English and French styles produced the same changes in instrumentation over time responding to the same need for increased volume and the same changing tastes. For example, Hillbilly music and Cajun music in the process of becoming marketable products for radio and record adopted the heavy use of Hawaiian and Spanish guitar, and decrease the prevalence of the violin or fiddle.<sup>24</sup> Overtime Hill-billy music became electrified (due to Hawaiian influence) and adopted drums eventually becoming modern country music. Cajun musicians adopted this same instrumentation simultaneously and by the 1940's a Cajun band would more likely resemble a Country band of the same era, than either group would compare to bands within their genre twenty years prior.<sup>25</sup>

During the 1940's the Cajun and Country were of such a likeness to one another many of the songs were interchangeable, meaning someone knowing neither French nor English would be unable to distinguish between genres based on sound alone. The country singer Hank Williams became the biggest star in country until his death in 1953, first achieved fame on the *Louisiana Hayride* radio program, the Cajuns played all of his music and he in return made a hit out of the Cajun song “Jambalaya” which nearly every *Country* artist recorded a version of until

---

22 Ibid, 11.

23 Ibid, 18.

24 Brasseux, *Cajun Breakdown*, 23.

25 Ibid, 55.

\*Note: Also see Hank Williams Drifting cowboys and the Cajun singer Bill Quinn's band compared to the Carter Family.

the 1980's.<sup>26</sup> The song Jambalaya in its' modern country form is in both French and English trading off between verses. This is not the only case of French to English diffusion to country music, for example, the song “Jole Blon” had similar success in the 1940's, becoming a million seller and even being covered by modern American rock bands and the quintessentially American Bruce Springsteen despite being completely in Cajun-French.<sup>27</sup>

Continuing the theme of one common American experience, Cajun music, like English language music in the 1950's felt the Rock n' Roll explosion change the landscape of musical tastes. Older Vernacular music forms fell out of style without regard to language and Rock 'n Roll hit the Cajun community with the same power as everywhere else in America creating what outsiders called the “Swamp-Pop” Genre.<sup>28</sup> Again, while the Cajuns played Elvis and Carl Perkins English speaking Americans unknowingly learned Cajun rock songs. Many early rock artists from Louisiana adopted Anglicized names as advised by their record companies, for example, Robert Guidry, became “Bobby Charles” and released Swamp-pop songs like, “See You Later Alligator” forever entering in to the American vernacular the phrase, *See You Later Alligator, after a while crocodile*, an obvious bayou inspired phrase with hidden French-Cajun influence.<sup>29</sup> Swamp-pop and early Rock n' Roll were really one in the same and remained popular until the crushing British Invasion, which in a the same shared fate, decimated the popularity American music without regard to language.<sup>30</sup>

The process by which the French Immigrants to Acadia underwent to become the Cajuns of Louisiana is an American story that produced a genuinely American people, who fully

---

26 Jolly, “Zydeco,” 34.  
27 Ibid, 30-31.  
28 Ibid, 179.  
29 Ibid, 182.  
30 Ibid, 197.

participated and contributed to national culture despite not speaking English as a first language.<sup>31</sup> The music of the Cajuns and Creole demonstrates the same racial relationships seen between poor English speaking white southerners and African-Americans. As shown, Cajun and Zydeco departed along racial lines becoming more of a barrier than language, as Cajun and Country grew together, while Zydeco and the Blues grew together. This bilingual American tradition included a shared development of songwriting and sharing, instrumentation, electrification and development into the rock era. In light of these interconnected and inseparable genres, the view of the historiography that Cajun/Zydeco are isolated and insignificant genres because of a perceived language barrier, is in serious error from lack of examination.

### **Spanish Language Music**

Spain being the first colonial power within the modern borders of the United States fostered a very active domestic Spanish language music tradition that is often underplayed in the historiography. Beginning with the very first Spanish Catholic missionaries who taught music their music to the Native Americans in Florida, California and the Southwest, the Spanish influence continues to reverberate within American music from a plethora of directions.<sup>32</sup> Being an essential ingredient from the beginning it is actually hard to distinguish the Spanish components within American music as it has always been present. For example, Mexican music

---

31 Brasseux, *Cajun Breakdown*, 5.

32 Richard L. Kagan, ed., *Spain in America: The Origins of Hispanism in the United States*, (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2002) 94.

is such a close an overlapping musical tradition that it is often described as an “unidentifiable seasoning” in American vernacular music.<sup>33</sup>

The American the Tex-Mex or Tejano folk music tradition began as soon as English settlers moved into the Mexican controlled territory that would one day become Texas. The Latin influence in Texas never subsided and became an indigenous music, not stagnant and foreign, but a domestic flowing creative influence on the music in the Southwest and later the entire United States.<sup>34</sup> A few musicologists have studied the Spanish-American folk tradition in the South-West and were surprised to find the Tejano and Chicano American traditions are still creating new music, and that these music forms were not reflections of developments in Mexico, rather contemporary music about the American experience from the Spanish language perspective.<sup>35 36 37</sup> The musicologist Louis Stein is convinced that the full influence of 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century Spanish and Latin American music on the musical culture of the United States is poorly defined, but that it can perhaps be ascertained by following the expanded use of the Spanish Guitar.<sup>38</sup> It is important to know that the standard American tuning for guitar (E-A-D-G- B-E) is the *Spanish* tuning, and the guitar itself a Mediterranean instrument, if we were to gauge the influence of the Spanish language American Vernacular music on American music in general by the use of the Spanish guitar, as Stein suggests, the influence is virtually ever present as the Spanish guitar is the dominant instrument in most, if not all of our national music genres.

33 John Storm Roberts, *The Latin Tinge: The Impact of Latin American Music on the United States*, (NYC: Oxford University Press, 1979) 21.

34 Ibid, 25.

35 Kagan, ed., *Spain in America*, 197.

36 Mody C. Boatright, *Mexican Border Ballads: and other lore* (Dallas: Southern Methodist University Press: 1967). 9.

37 Americo Paredes, *A Texas-Mexican Cancionero: Folk Songs of the Lower Border* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1976) 8.

38 Kagan, ed., *Spain in America*, 196.

The use of the Spanish guitar in American music worked so well because much of our music has Spanish roots that the historiography ignores. Orchestral music in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century, at the beginning of sheet music industry, often used a uniquely American sound known as the “Spanish Idiom” which had a Spanish feel about, but was completely American in origin.<sup>39</sup> These adornments were meant to create an exotic, sensual feeling in contrast to the proper church-based Protestant morality music of the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century, however the Spanish style became so prevalent in American tradition that it lost the escapist feel as originally intended and people do not easily recognize it.<sup>40</sup> Historians refer to these American made Spanish songs as “Latunes,” which could be in the Spanish language or be Spanish music set to English lyrics, either way these songs were completely American start to finish.<sup>41</sup> For example, many of whom the historiography claims to be the quintessentially American composers actually worked with Latunes, including, George Gershwin, Irving Berlin and Cole Porter.<sup>42</sup>

Jazz, one of the earliest American music genres, developed in New Orleans in close proximity to the Caribbean, the Tejanos of Texas and the previously mention Cajun-Creole communities. In fact, the song “St.Louis Blues” by W.C. Handy which single handedly launched the nationwide popularity of Jazz (and later interest in the blues) is actually a Spanish tango.<sup>43</sup> This is no surprise as many early Jazz musicians in New Orleans were wrong labeled as Creole when in fact they were Cuban and Mexican-American.<sup>44</sup> These musicians, considered racially in-

---

39 Ibid, 198.

40 Ibid, 231.

41 Gustavo Pérez Firmat,“LATUNES,” *Latin American Research Review* 43, no. 2 (April 2008): 180.

42 Ibid, 180.

43 Roberts, *The Latin Tinge*, 30.

44 Ibid, 36.

between were able to jump back and forth between black and white musical groups depending on the racial laws of a particular area, helping to further blend white and black musical forms, not to mention any Latin additions of their own, in this respect Latin musicians really served to help create the African-American/Anglo-American center of American music as purported to exist by the historiography.<sup>45</sup>

Really all of the dance music throughout the American Jazz and Swing eras were Latin rhythms, such as the tango, conga, mambo and rumba, again created by American composers for American listeners.<sup>46</sup> Americo Paredes, an expert in affairs of the border region, considers the popularity of television as a major dividing factor along the Texas border, where American side Mexican only received English language programming. This division helped foster a split between identifying as Mexican and being a Mexican-American, Chicano, or some other term denoting being a part of the United States.<sup>47</sup> John Storm Roberts argues convincingly that the Western Swing genre, while blending country and jazz also is considerably influenced by Tejano music, the use of the accordion being a glaring admission of influence.<sup>48</sup> The popularity of rock music made older and rural forms of music the Tejano and Chicano communities unpopular among youths who, in a common American experience embraced Rock n' Roll while the folk music suffered the same fate as English language country music, and French language Cajun and Zydeco.<sup>49</sup>

---

45 Ibid, 37,

46 Ibid, 84.

47 Paredes, *A Texas-Mexican*, 157.

48 Roberts, *The Latin Tinge*, 97.

49 Paredes, *A Texas-Mexican*, 157.

According to Frances R. Aparicio, “most of the existing histories of rock underplay or ignore” Chicano contributions.<sup>50</sup> The influence of Spanish-speaking individuals on early Rock n’ Roll transcends the few individual performers often mentioned by rock histories, such as Ritchie “La Bamba” Valens, Sam “the Sham” and the Pharaohs, and later Chris Montez, Carlos Santana and Jose Feliciano.<sup>51</sup> For example, the seminal African-American rock star Ellas “Bo Diddley” Bates famously used a beat that became known as the “Bo Diddley beat” which is actually a Latin Rumba.<sup>52</sup> The “Bo Diddley beat” never fell out of popularity in American rock music, from Elvis in the 1950’s, to the Stooges in the 1960’s, George Thorogood in the 1970’s, Guns and Roses in the 1980’s to the White Stripes in the 1990’s and so on. Still focusing on musical beats, disco music, an American genre, is rooted in salsa and the Latin hustle mixed in with the common African-American and English White-American roots, this can best be seen in the sophisticated rhythms involved, and the highly organized danced moves associated with the work of bands such as *The Bee Gees* and *KC and the Sunshine Band*.<sup>53</sup>

Conversely while disco and rock have underrepresented Spanish musical roots, many assume Salsa music is a Spanish-language import, however it is a 100% American-made music genre that just happens to be based in Spanish.<sup>54</sup> Salsa simply meaning “sauce” is rooted in American Jazz and rock music and (like the old “pace salsa” commercials) was created in New York City.<sup>55</sup> In fact, Spanish and Hispanic musicians refer to Salsa as “the New York sound.”<sup>56</sup>

---

50 Aparicio, *Candida*, 15.

51 Ibid.

52 Ibid, 16.

53 Ibid.

54 Charley Gerard and Marty Sheller, *Salsa! The Rhythm of Latin Music*, (Crown Point, IN: White Cliffs Media Company, 1989).

55 Ibid, 3.

56 Ibid.

Salsa is a distinct product of the “New York commercial music industry.” Blending contemporary and English language music genres with traditional Spanish and Caribbean forms to create a form of music popular with Cuban-Americans, Puerto-Ricans, and appealing to other demographics in the United States and beyond.<sup>57</sup> Concerning Cuban music in general, ever since Fidel Castro took power in 1959, New York City became the creative center of Cuban music: for over a half a century innovation in “Cuban” music has actually been American in origin.<sup>58</sup>

The combinations of English and Spanish language music is so inter-meshed that it is impossible to speak of “American” music without finding characteristics that do not fit the English and African-American background often solely credited in the historiography for developing unique music styles in the United States. As shown, American genres like Jazz, Blues, Rock and Disco have inseparable Spanish foundations, whereas genres thought to be foreign because of its use of Spanish, such as Salsa (and Cuban music in general) are actually homegrown American music styles. After the Native American music tradition, the earliest folk music played within the borders of the modern United States was sung in Spanish, the next being French and lastly English.

### **Hawaiian Music**

In comparison to French and Spanish traditions, Hawaiian music has had the least amount of time and the fewest practitioners to influence American musical development, however, the Hawaiian roots of American Vernacular music is disproportionately grand in scope. This phenomenal influence is only referenced within seven pages between the eleven texts

---

57 Ibid, 10.

58 Ibid, 4.

comprising the historiography.<sup>59</sup> As will be shown in this section “traditional” Hawaiian music is actually very American and in return, American musical development in the 20<sup>th</sup> century largely took shape from the importation of Hawaiian music to the mainland.

Before the age of Exploration, Hawaiian music was essentially Polynesian in origin, however, by the dawn of the recording era, “Hawaiian music” had fundamentally absorbed American and Western musical influences brought to the island. American church music, the genre from which the historiography found the earliest original American compositions, introduced the idea of concrete song structure and vocal/instrumental parts to the Hawaiians.<sup>60</sup> the American Civil War is actually responsible for introducing the Spanish guitar to Hawaii: A Confederate ship known as the *Shenandoah* sank a boat of Portuguese Whalers who found refuge on the Hawaiian Islands, bringing their guitars with them.<sup>61</sup> It is from this event, that the ukulele, a signature “Hawaiian” instrument was develop from the miniature guitar.<sup>62</sup> Spanish speaking cowboys from California later introduced falsetto singing to Hawaii.<sup>63</sup> To sing in Falsetto means to use your *false-voice* to sing much higher than what would normally be comfortable. Falsetto singing fell into complete disuse in mainland America, until the Hawaiian later reintroduced it with many unaware of its' domestic origin.

Hawaiians experimented with all these, mostly American influences and became creative innovators in music. The Hawaiians were the first to use the guitar as an instrument for soloing and replaced the Spanish guitar's quiet cat-gut stings with metal strings for better

---

59 See table associated with citation 1 of this paper for the text references on Hawaii

60 George S. Kanahale, *Hawaiian music and musicians; and illustrated History* (Honolulu: The University Press of Hawaii, 1979) xxv.

61 Tim Brookes, “The Hawaiian Invasion,” *American History* 39, no. 5 (December 2004): 50.

62 Kanahale, *Hawaiian music*, 394.

63 Kanahale, *Hawaiian music*, 87.

volume, which nearly every guitar (except classical) now uses.<sup>64</sup> In 1885 an 11 year old Hawaiian boy named Joseph Kekuku invented playing the guitar with a slide steel imitating the oscillations of Hawaiian chant singing, which like much of non-western music does not rely on a defined systems of notes working in steps.<sup>65</sup> The invention of the steel guitar in Hawaii would come to influence the sound of nearly every American genre. Because Hawaiian music already had so many Western and American influences built into its tradition, the sound of Hawaiian music was poised to easily diffuse back into the American mainland.<sup>66</sup>

The historiography is grossly deficient in identifying the period of influx of Hawaiian music to the greater United States, which started because of the Panama-Pacific International Exposition of 1915, causing what many many scholars call the *Hawaiian Craze* or *Invasion*.<sup>67</sup> One year later, in 1916, Hawaiian music was the most popular genre of music in the United States in terms of record and sheet music sales.<sup>68</sup> The rise in popularity of Hawaiian music was an opportunity for upward mobility for all Polynesians in the mainland United States.<sup>69</sup> Tin-Pan-Alley and Broadway began to turn out “pseudo-Hawaiian” songs.<sup>70</sup> More importantly, Cajun, Hillbilly and Western bands all added Steel guitar to their music becoming central to the modern country sound. When Western steel guitar players began playing swing music, like Bob Wills and the Texas Playboys, the American Western-Swing Genre emerged as a direct result of Hawaiian influence.<sup>71</sup>

---

64 Brookes, “The Hawaiian Invasion,” 80.

65 Ibid, 50.

66 Kanahale, *Hawaiian music*, 171.

67 Ibid, 290.

68 Ibid, 292.

69 Brookes, “The Hawaiian Invasion,” 57.

70 Ibid, 53.

71 Ibid, 55.

The Hawaiian Invasion produced a wave of instrumental innovation that is responsible for defining the sound of many American music genres. The guitar, now being a solo instrument, needed to be louder to compete with the volume of orchestras and large ensembles. The Hawaiian guitar, or steel guitar, is the basis for the Dobro, used most often in Bluegrass, the resonator guitar used in early Country-Blues, the pedal-steel which produces a sound that is instantly associated with country music, and yes, ultimately the electric guitar.<sup>72</sup> The country music artist Bob Dunn is the first person to electrify a guitar and he did so after learning the Hawaiian steel guitar and wanting to amplify its sound for large group performances.<sup>73</sup> American music without the Dobro, pedal-steel, resonator, steel and electric guitar would simply be unrecognizable: the Hawaiian influence cannot be removed without destroying some of the music's American flavor.

The Hawaiian Invasion also reintroduced the use of Falsetto singing back into the United States.<sup>74</sup> Before 1915 the only significant use of falsetto in American music was in association with yodeling, however, the Hawaiian would perform whole songs in this false-voice. In the 1960's Brian Wilson of the Beach Boys almost single handedly created the American Surf music genre. Surf music, has inherently Hawaiian connotations, and uses falsetto singing extensively. A few examples of falsetto use in Surf music include, "Barbara Ann," "Good Vibrations" by the *Beach Boys* and "The Little Old Lady from Pasadena" by *Jan and Dean*. The use of Falsetto also found a less pervasive role in all of American popular music. Motown and early R&B, for example, use falsetto singing for a soft heartfelt effect, often used by Smokey Robinson and by

---

72 Ibid, 56, 76, 78.

73 Kanahale, *Hawaiian music*, 372.

74 Kanahale, *Hawaiian music*, xxiii.

the Temptations, later practitioners include the likes of Michael Jackson and current stars like Bruno Mars. In rock music other than surf music) the falsetto can be heard prominently in songs like Del Shannon's "Runaway," many of the songs by *Frankie Vallie and the Four Seasons*, and in many disco records, especially those recorded by *The Bee Gees*.

Two of the most popular modern American rock bands at the time of writing this paper are *Maroon 5* and *Train*. The lead singer of *Maroon 5*, Adam Lambert uses a falsetto at some point in all of their most successful songs, for example, "She will be loved," "Moves like Jagger" and "This love." in 2009, the band *Train* revived their career with **one song**, their best selling song to date, the Grammy award winning "Hey Soul Sister."<sup>75</sup> This song uses falsetto singing extensively and its' leading instrument is actually a ukulele.

For being such a small and distant minority within the United States, Hawaiian people in their immersion into the American experience, have heavily influenced nearly every American music genre as it would be hard to imagine Elvis without his electric guitar, Hank Williams without the cry of the pedal steel and the Beach Boys without their high-pitched harmonies. As shown, the lasting effect of Hawaiian music is more than a 100 year old *craze*, and yet it is not quite an *invasion* because by the time Hawaiian music gained mainland notoriety it had already been formed with the same basic building blocks that underlay the rest of American music beginning with American church music.

---

75 *Hey Soul Sister*, *The Recording Industry Association of America*, <http://riaa.com/goldandplatinumdata.php?artist=%22Hey,%20Soul%20Sister%22>, date accessed December 1<sup>st</sup> 2012.

## Summation

If we were to limit the music by Spanish, French and Hawaiian language music traditions to a maximum of 2.35% (as represented in the historiography) of the American music heard on the radio the F.M. band would be riddled with Old English fiddle tunes and German Polka music. Through discovering the roots of Zydeco, Cajun, Hawaiian, Salsa and other foreign language traditions it becomes clear that these genres are as American as any other. Additionally, Its not that these traditions merely *flavored* American genres, as some suggest, these traditions explicitly helped *create* American genres like Jazz, Swing, Western-Swing, Blues, Country, Rock 'n Roll, Disco, and Surf music through American citizens who happened to not speak English as a first language.

To review, the Cajuns and Creoles as peoples were unique to America, carving new identities in response to American geography and events within the United States and their music carried the stamp of American design. The French speakers of Louisiana were not a collection of isolated groups, rather full participants in the American experience and so their music is not insular like that of the Native Americans. French speaking Americans especially took interest in country, western and rock music with notable songs and individuals performing at the national level. Artist even Anglicized their names and lyrics, covertly spreading the French influence using the English language.

Besides the Native Americans the first folk songs in America were sung in Spanish and as the border moved across populations the Tejano and Chicano music stayed in the United States despite the Hegemony of English Speakers. Spanish tradition seems to have most fundamentally influenced all the music Americans like to dance to: from the Jazz age until today, providing the vital kinesthetic experience of the American tradition. More than dance,

however, the Spanish influence is oldest and most diffuse influence of all three traditions and so hardest to pinpoint clear definitions and borders. Spanish music also had an influence on Hawaiian and Cajun/Zydeco as these traditions often diffused directly into one another.

Most recently the Hawaiian music tradition, itself a Polynesia-American hybrid, sounded both exotic yet familiar enough to the American ear to be, at one time, the most popular genre in the United States. The invasion of Hawaiian music forever changed American instrumentation, the electric guitar alone defining the sound of Rock n' Roll. While the Spanish introduced the guitar to America the Hawaiian's use of it as a solo leading instrument dominates American music. Even the term "Hawaiian" is in reference to an American state and it's music created the ubiquitously American Surf genre, and yet this tradition in the historiography is the least referenced of all three.

The inclusive reality of our American Vernacular music is a testament to the historic diversity of the American people. The struggle to recognize this multilingual tradition reflects past and modern attitudes toward non-English speakers as foreign, on the margins of influential society, or part of the proverbial us-and-them mentality. It is apparent from the research into American music in languages other than English that the historiography is woefully misrepresenting the heritage of American Vernacular music as a White and African American English speaking tradition, whereas, in places often mentioned like New Orleans, the creation of truly American music is not bound to any single language. Instead of border and barriers American music is the story of uninhibited creativity.

## Afterword

For the final portion of this thesis, this expanded body and greater view of American music will be the scope considered. I believe this will also more accurately represent the demographics of the modern American classroom than the American tradition found predominantly in the historiography. In the final portion, American music will be selected in text, audio and visual forms for meaningful integration into the social studies curriculum. Student centered assignments will be developed to use these songs as primary documents putting music to America's past. The assignments developed will take into account any educational research that can be located related to music integration and will seek to find new and innovative applications.

As a final piece of this portion of my thesis a music CD is included with descriptions, to better demonstrate some of the genres and sounds described in words that i feel are better understood through hearing.

## Bibliography

Acosta, Leonardo. "The Year 1898 in the Music of the Caribbean: Cuba and Puerto Rico in the Machinations of the U.S. Music Industry." *Centro Journal* 16, no. 1 (Spring 2004): 6–16.

Aparicio, Frances R. *Jaquez, Candida f. Musical Migrations: Cultural Hybridity in Latin/o America, Volume 1*. New York City: Palgrave MacMillan, 2003.

Boatright, Mody C. *Mexican Border Ballads: and other lore*. Dallas: Southern Methodist University Press: 1967.

Brasseux, Ryan. *Cajun Breakdown: the emergence of American-made music*. NYC: Oxford University Press, 2009.

Brookes, Tim. "The Hawaiian Invasion." *American History* 39, no. 5 (December 2004): 48–80.

Broven, John. *South to Louisiana: the Music of the Cajun Bayous*. Gretna: Pelican Publishing Company, 1983.

Chase, Gilbert. *America's Music: From the Pilgrims to the Present*. Chicago: University of Illinois, 1987.

Crawford, Richard. *America's Musical Life: A History*. New York City: WW Norton and Company, 2001.

Cusic, Don. *Baseball and Country Music*. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2003.

Edwards, Leigh H. *Johnny Cash and the paradox of American Identity*. Bloomington; University of Indiana Press, 2009.

Elson, Louis C. *American Music*. New York City: The Macmillan Company, 1915.

Firmat, Gustavo Pérez. "LATUNES." *Latin American Research Review* 43, no. 2 (April 2008): 180–203.

Gerard, Charley and Sheller, Marty. *Salsa! The Rhythm of Latin Music*. Crown Point, IN: White Cliffs Media Company, 1989.

Goldschmitt, Kariann. "Doing the Bossa Nova." *Luso-Brazilian Review* 48, no. 1 (June 2011): 61–78.

Gonzales, Patrisia, and Roberto Rodriguez. "The Tex-Mex Mix." *American Demographics* 16, no. 6 (June 1994): 40.

Hitchcock, H. Wiley. *Music in the United States: A Historical Introduction*. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall, 2000.

Howard, John Tasker; Bellows, George Kent. *A Short History of Music in America*. New City: Thomas Y. Crowell Company, 1957.

Kagan, Richard L. ed. *Spain in America: The Origins of Hispanism in the United States*, .Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2002.

Kanahele, George S. *Hawaiian music and musicians; and illustrated History* .Honolulu: The University Press of Hawaii, 1979.

Kingman, Daniel. *American Music: A Panorama*. New York City: Schirmer Books, 1973.

Jolly, Desmond A. "Zydeco and Cajun-Music From Francophone America." *Multicultural Perspectives* 2, no. 3 (July 2000): 25–26. doi:10.1207/S15327892MCP0203\_06.

Lornell, Kip. *Introducing American Folk Music*. Indianapolis: Brown and Benchmark Publishers, 1993.

Malone, Bill C. *Southern Music / American Music*. Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 1979.

Paredes, Americo. *A Texas-Mexican Cancionero: Folk Songs of the Lower Border* . Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1976.

Roberts, John Storm. *The Latin Tinge: The Impact of Latin American Music on the United States*. NYC: Oxford University Press, 1979.

Ruymar, Lorene. *The Hawaiian Steel Guitar and Its Great Hawaiian Musicians / Compiled and Edited by Lorene Ruymar ; Foreword by Jerry Byrd*. Centerstream Pub. ., c1996.

Sablosky, Irving. *American Music*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1969.

Sanjek, Russell. *American Popular Music and its Business: The First Four Hundred Years The Beginning to 1790*. New York, Oxford University Press, 1988.

Spaeth, Sigmund. *A History of Popular Music in America*. New York City: Random House, 1948.

Wilder, Alec. *American Popular Song: The Great Innovators, 1900-1950*. New York City: Oxford University Press, 1972.



**Supplemental CD tracks – For educational use only**

**French Cajun-**

**Zydeco**

1. 1946 – Jole Blon by Harry Coates – compare to track 2 a country recording
2. 1951 – Hank William's country recording of the Cajun song Jambalaya, also features a pedal steel to compare with the steel guitar in Aloha Oe
3. The Swamp-Pop song Bobby Charles AKA Robert Guidry “See you later alligator” compare to track 4.
4. Shake Rattle and Roll by Bill Haley and the Comets – An early rock example

**Spanish**

5. Traditional Spanish Tango compare with track 6
6. St.Louis Blues by W.C. Handy recorded by Louis Armstrong
7. A Spanish Hustle compare to track 7
8. The Bee Gees – Stayin' Alive, also featuring Falsetto voice compare to Aloha Oe
9. Bo Diddley – Who do you love – to hear the “Bo Diddly Beat”

**Hawaiian**

10. Aloha Oe – Written by Queen Liliuokalani herself, compare Falsetto with 11, 12, and 13.
11. Beach Boys – Good Vibrations – use of falsetto
12. Maroon 5 – She will be loved – Modern use of falsetto
13. Train – Hey Soul Sister – Modern use of Ukulele and Falsetto from tack 10.

Eric Yanis

Thesis Part III

Using music as source material in the social studies classroom

In the first part of this thesis I went into the historiography of American vernacular music. Vernacular music is a term referring to both the folk and popular music genres, excluding what is considered more “high brow” art forms like classical, orchestral, instrumental Jazz and opera. In this historiography it was determined that as time progressed scholars have widened their scope of what kinds of music is worth studying on an academic level. In a similar fashion, the field of genres considered genuinely American has likewise increased overtime. However, the historiography showed a distinct lack of acknowledgment of music in languages, or traditions, other than English. The meta narrative behind much of American music history is an English speaking fusion of British and African American music traditions. While the rightful inclusion of African Americans as producers of American culture is a positive step forward, these histories literally reduce the traditions of American vernacular music to black-and-white.

In the second part of this thesis I highlighted and argued that several ignored and seemingly foreign cultures had a profound effect on American music, not merely flavoring our sounds, but composing its very nature. This expanded the borders of American music across languages, and also national boundaries, a testament to the fluidity of cultural diffusion and location of our borders throughout our formation. With the inclusion of Native American, Cajun-French, Creole, Chicano, Tejano, and Hawaiian music into the history of American music and much grander picture appears that explains the gaps in the traditional narrative and presents a model for the diverse and interconnected society that we strive for today.

In this third part of the thesis I have applied this vision to the NYS social studies curriculum. The intention of this final part of the project is two-fold first of which is to present students with alternative sources that reflect the point of views and experiences of the greater middle and lower classes in American history, versus the treaties and speeches of politicians and generals. The second intention of this project is to create a database of source material for students that is more accessible in language, less intimidating in nature and multi-sensory in form. The resulting collection covers a wide

swath of American culture uninhibited by the concerns of speechwriters, newspaper editors and politically motivated rhetoric.

### **The Website Database**

The website component of the project is designed as a resource for fellow social studies teachers. It is a wiki-type of website that will allow others to expand on and add to the collection and related materials. This collaborative feature will be activated when this thesis is completed to ensure that the content of the website is of my own creation. Avoiding the option of creating lesson or unit plans, most of the songs in the collection are divided into themes and offer further suggestions on how to integrate individual songs as source material. With every song is an accompanying video that I found to either have the most modern rendition of the song, for the sake of students' taste, or had the best visual/information to further the listening experience. The lyrics are also posted for each song, except for those of which the copyright is still valid. In such case links are provided for off-site content. Many of the songs because of their popular use have no single author or date of composition, but when available all credit is given to known authors and artists.

The sources themselves range in date from 1642 to 2009 and were selected based on several criteria. Especially with the older sources it was important that the songs were authentic to the time of their subject and composed during the events or reflecting back upon them. For this reason of authenticity, songs like "Low Bridge," about the Eerie Canal, or "Don't Fence Me In," about the West, were explicitly excluded from this collection as their compositions were written many years after their subjects by writers uninvolved in the development of their topics. Songs such as these are more nostalgic in nature, reflecting the sense of loss of traditions in their own time, rather than a artifact of authentic culture from the specified time period. For this same reason songs written in the modern age that merely recount past events for educational purposes have also been omitted, as these again are not a source of how people lived and felt in the past but rather an interpretation of distilled knowledge in

the present. The songs on this website collection are, to the best of my knowledge, genuine period pieces, akin to any other diary or autobiography unedited by the hands of time.

The individual collections are intended to reflect units or groups of units within the NYS social studies curriculum, for a faster and more cohesive use of the source materials. Most are determined by time period, however, the collection on America as a whole spans the entirety of U.S. History. This collection is especially designed for showing students the gradual shifting of views on America over time, concerning both what the United States is to the world and what about people have found special. One major change found along the time line of patriot music is the shift in pride from the U.S. Is the land of our “fathers,” such as in “Oh Columbia,” and “My Country 'Tis of Thee,” to the celebration of our diversity found in, “America” by Waylon Jennings and “American Saturday Night,” by Brad Paisley. However, there are constants over time in this collection that students can find, such as the use of religion and references to God, and the appreciation of the beauty of the land.

The Colonial Collection contains a diverse selection of period pieces from Native American, French, English, New England and Chesapeake sources. Being so diverse it is the least cohesive in themes ranging across nearly 200 years of history on a sparse continent. The collection does hold a number of songs selected specifically because they have some germ of an idea or bit of culture that would flourish in the later collections. Songs like “Captain Kidd,” and “Whiskey in a Jar,” were popular songs in colonial port cities and contain outlaw type characters and those who did not care much for proper English authority. These feelings were mere symptoms of the future culmination of aggressions with the mother country. Also the romanticism of the outlaw, rebellious, robin hood anti-hero grew to be an American staple, especially prevalent in the Wild West Collection.

The Colonial Collection also features the “Huron Carol,” which is a popular Christmas song to this day, and is a very early attempt at blending New and Old World traditions into something uniquely American, a premise often mentioned in part one of my thesis. Additionally a traditional Iroquois dance and song is included. As covered in part two of my thesis the Native American tradition of music

remains one of the truly isolated genres that bears little relation to other American traditions.

The Colonial Collection also contains songs about very specific historical events like the “Death of Wolfe,” which describes the battle on the Plains of Abraham, of which the repercussions were felt by the English, French and Native Americans, shaping relations and national borders. “Liberty Tree,” is a song written by Thomas Paine about the nature and value of liberty itself; rather than reading long passages from Paine they can listen to his words and feel the music as he intended it to be felt on an emotional level. The song “Yankee Doodle,” is an especially useful song for inclusion into the classroom because students are so familiar with it they are not intimidated. Students know well the words and yet forget the true origin and meaning of the song that really illustrates the cultural void between England and her North American colonies. On the website I uploaded an earlier project on “Yankee Doodle,” that helps explain the jargon in the song in modern terms to a school aged audience.

The next collection of songs concern the Civil War and the period of time shortly before and after. “Follow the Drinking Gourd,” is a great song first disseminated among slaves in the 1850's that has a strong back story. The song “No More Auction Block,” is from the African American perspective about the changes and outcome of the Civil War. In this collection there are also songs that complicate the simplistic view of the Civil War that we might interpret through speeches and war maps; such as in the case of “Yellow Rose of Texas,” wherein the Rose mentioned was originally a “colored” girl. Also many songs like “Vacant Chair,” and “Was my Brother in the Battle?,” serves as testimony to the experience of those at home while the soldiers fought. Finally in this collection, “I’m a Good Old Rebel,” expresses the often overlooked resentment felt by many in the South after the Civil War, the language of the song is simple and students will enjoy this song.

The fourth collection on the website is about the western frontier, cowboys, fur-traders, and gold prospectors. Special care had to be taken in compiling these songs as this period and the subject surrounding the West were inspiration for countless numbers of later musical compositions. To help discern between the authentic and the nostalgic I relied heavily on the judgment of musicologists John

and Alan Lomax and the information he gathered in several of their publications.<sup>1 2</sup> The collection contains the song “Shenandoah,” about an either French or English fur-trader longing over his Native American love and the land of her people along the U.S. Canadian border. Likewise to the South “El Rancho Grande,” is a Mexican cowboy song sung on either side of the border, that can be compared to the themes of the English language songs, like “On the trail to Mexico.” Again in this collection is the reappearance of the outlaw in songs like “Jesse James,” and “Billy the Kid,” with the same themes, only more developed as the songs in the Colonial Collection.

The West Collection also contains a work song, “John Henry,” which will enable students to understand more about the use of song, not just as entertainment at the time, but as a means of regulating the rate of work. Such a use of music today can only be compared to playing music as part of a work-out routine. This song was also specifically selected because John Henry was our first African American folk hero, and it is significant that such a glorification of the man John Henry (whether he really existed or not) came only after the Civil War. Lastly, the song itself is about the man vs. machine mentality that came to be and persists to the present in some form as ideas of self-worth and the nature of masculinity became relevant in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, I have an essay and power-point of visual art just on this subject uploaded to the website for a class I took in the past.

The next collection on the Dust Bowl and the Great Depression was the most difficult to select the individual songs for, because the invention of the phonograph and the explosion of the music industry greatly increased the number of songs cataloged and preserved for present enjoyment. The Songs of Woody Guthrie alone could have sufficed but the sources vary in nature in similar fashion to the other collections. The first song in the collection is about the dreaded boll weevil, an insect that destroyed cotton farms all throughout the Americas. This international pest is virtually overlooked by the social studies curriculum, but had a devastating effect on poor farmers and work hands. Evidence of

---

1 Alan Lomax, *The folk songs of North America* (Gardern City, NY: Doubleday & Company, 1960).

2 John and Alan Lomax, *Folk Song USA* (NYC: Duell, Sloan and Pierce, 1947).

the impact of this insect is in the sheer number of songs recorded about the boll weevil, the best of which are on the website. While most of the songs about the weevil were recorded by African American artists, many white folk and country artist also recorded their own versions in the 1940's and afterward.

Coupled with the boll weevil, the man-made desertification of the Great Plains in the 1930's created the great Dust Bowl. The dry soil created by irresponsible farming techniques and a series of droughts created insufferable storms of deadly dust that forced a great exodus of people from all walks of life, eventually provoking a response and intervention from the government. Woody Guthrie, a genuine "Okie" wrote many songs about the Dust Bowl, which is partially responsible for launching his music career. Songs written by Guthrie are best accompanied by reading, *The Grapes of Wrath*, and similar literature from the era. In the collection I have included Guthrie's, "The Great Dust Storm," told from a first person narration, it is a tragic and straight-forward story song that will put students into the mindset of a dust bowl refugee. The other Woody Guthrie song in this collection is "The Grand Coulee Dam," which the government paid Guthrie to write. This is an example of a work of art created through New Deal programs like the Works Progress Administration, which students are often only shown the construction projects.

The collection's other songs on the Great Depression are from a more popular jazz vein and placed in a more urban setting. "Brother Can You Spare A Dime?" is a perfect song for comparing with students the 1920's to the 1930's as the central theme of the song is a fallen man who had high hopes only to find himself left begging. As similar story can be found in "A Picture From life's Other Side," which flips between the life of the wealthy or well-off and those at the margins of society or experiencing life altering travesties. One such problem that ravaged populations until after WWII was tuberculosis which endemically caused the slow suffering death of those infected. The country/blues artist Jimmie Rodgers contracted the disease and composed his own, "TB Blues" recording shortly before his death. This song is a true source of the emotional ordeal that a terminal disease can wrought

on a person and students will not only learn about TB, but hopefully begin to understand the thoughts of a man during the depression facing his own imminent death. It is in sources like these that students experience a more enduring type of learning than reading over unemployment rates of the depression, or looking at a map of the dust bowl.

I have also included in the collection another work song, similar to that of “John Henry.” The “Rock Island Line,” is a field song that, much like “Follow the Drinking Gourd,” might have originally been used as a source of information about the Underground Railroad although the song is so altered by time that this point is debatable. The interesting thing about this song is that by the time of the Great Depression manual laborers used this piece as a means to encourage fellow hands to speed up the rate of work. The song itself increases in tempo until the very end, which in many recordings, is at a fevered pitch. The song shows the desperation on behalf of workers, whom feel the need to work faster and fill the time of doing tedious manual labor with singing.

In the World War Two Collection I tried to highlight the often overlooked anti-war movement that quickly died off after the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor. I included the song, “Billy Boy,” by the Almanac Singers criticizes the common notions of warfare and reasons a young man might go off to war. The song is a rhetorical conversation between two individuals; the first being a tempter of sorts luring Billy in with promises of glory and valor, while Billy being the second person rejects these advances. It is interesting then to note how fast the Almanac Singers switched from being anti-war to be anti-fascist when the United States then entered WWII and followed the flood of new compositions.

“Der Fuehrer’s Face,” is a hilarious song about Adolf Hitler, the Nazi Party and the beliefs that governed their tenure over Europe. Students will find this song funny, but will also be able to pick a dozen or so individuals and policies out of the lyrics, which makes this song as good as any political cartoon of the time. On a more serious note the songster Ledbelly, recorded a song in 1942 simply known as, “The Hitler Song,” which openly attacks Hitler's treatment of the Jewish people. Without any knowledge of the Holocaust this song is a true artifact of the place and time of its composition, also

it interesting to note that of all the songs in this collection, only this song mentions directly the gross violation of human rights conducted by the Nazi party on the Jewish people. Perhaps it is the fact that ledbelly was an African American who lived in the South During the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century that might have shaped his perspective of the war away from the tanks and borders to the persecution of a race. It is in sources like these that parallels can be made with students and they can see the interconnectedness of the human experience.

“Praise the Lord and Pass the Ammunition,” is a typical American WWII anthem that plays into the theme often seen in the Patriotic collection that *God is on our side*. “American Defense” is a song by the bluesman Son House that urges people back home to do what is necessary in total war, like conserving vital supplies and buying war bonds. The songs in this collection taken in as a whole offer a wide and varied picture of the war from beginning to end, it was my intention to show all these different interpretations.

The final song in the collection is more reflective and seeks to find some meaning from the resolution of WWII. “Hitler Lives,” is a more obscure song but nevertheless contains the moral message that if we do not learn from the experience of war and the pestilence created from hate, than in a sense “Hitler Lives.” This source is a poignant way to end a unit on WWII and it is worth exploring with students if the world truly learned from the experience of war or if we inevitably repeat the same behaviors.

The Cold War collection is extensive in its themes and time range spanning the 1950's to the very end of the 1980's. Much like the Patriot collection students can follow the progression of themes chronologically marking the highs and lows of hostility and fear along the way. The first two songs in the collection are humorous satire, the first being Hank Williams' “No, No Joe,” that directly speaks to Joseph Stalin and rejects his economic and sociopolitical, reaffirming the American and Western tradition. The song references past leader whom the United States fought in open war and warns Stalin that the American people are not easily intimidated. This song is a great example of the “better dead

than red,” position many people held, especially in the 1950's. From my own research I believe this song is the first example of the no-nonsense, no-negotiation pro-American attitude that is often seen in country music, and the development of this trend can be seen in the Patriotism, Vietnam and 911 collections.

Bob Dylan's, “Talkin' John Birch Society Blues,” is a piece of satire opposing the “better dead than red” mentality. It is actually a very funny song that students will appreciate about a man who gets bored and so decides to look for communists in ridiculous places. The song ends with the narrator investigating himself and simultaneously hoping he doesn't find out very much. This song highlights the more unrealistic fears of McCarthyism and the general paranoia surrounding the Cold War. Bob Dylan has two other songs in this collection both very serious in nature. “Master's of War,” is a downright grim and bitter song about those who engineer and profit from war, referencing Eisenhower's Military-Industrial Complex. The narrator of the song describes how the efforts of war makers crush the dreams of the living and those unborn and so the singer is waiting for the death of such individuals and waits to stand over their graves. Similarly Dylan's “With God On Our Side,” looks back at the full span of American history and directly addresses the recurring theme that the United States is graced by the favor of God in conflict. This song is also useful in examining the past teaching of social studies in general, as the narrator relates the story of American history as it was taught to him, before questioning it's validity. The song ends with the ominous mention of mutually assured destruction.

The theme of an eventual nuclear war is found throughout the music of the Cold War once arsenals of atomic weaponry had reached the point of earth consuming proportions. The pop-folk song “Eve of Destruction,” is a perfect example of the anxiety created by the tumultuous world of the 1960's when problems and movements layered on-top of one another. The song references many events that students can try to identify from all over the world, as well as seeks to compare hatred in one land to another. The song is very emotional and builds from a soft ballad in the beginning to a screaming dirge toward the end and effect that even the modern ear will understand. A later song by the artist Prince in

this collect reflects the same fear and takes an opposing carefree view of the present to contrast with “Eve of Destruction.”

The last song in the Cold War collection is “Leningrad,” recorded by Billy Joel in 1989. This song released during the closing years of the Cold War reflect the attitude of reconciliation and the recognition of common humanity that characterized the ending of hostilities. The song methodically compares Joel's own life to that of a man he met in the USSR while on tour. The lyrics cover almost the entirety of the Cold War, describing the air drills, fear, propaganda and wars that each side experienced only to discover in the end an unlikely friendship. This song serves as a great closer to a unit on the Cold War, much like the song “Hitler Lives,” in that it highlights the moral lessons that are to be learned from history.

The Civil Rights collection begins with two protest songs used on the streets and at sit-ins, which brought people together and expressed complicated desires with simple lyrics. The most famous protest song is “We shall not be moved,” a simple but poignant composition, like many on the website it has no single known author and is truly a creation of the masses. The earliest dated song in this collection is “Strange Fruit,” made famous by Billie Holiday. The video attached on the web page illustrates the already graphic language that depicts the lynching of African Americans in the South. This song alone, is enough background to emotionally open a unit on the Civil Rights movement, as it justifies all thereafter.

I could not help but include two more Bob Dylan songs into this collection, both of which are case studies of violence toward African Americans. “The Lonesome Death of Hattie Carol,” is about one such criminal case in which a young wealthy white man named William Zantzinger, struck an older African American barmaid with a cane, the resulting trauma causing her death. Many like Dylan were unhappy with Zantzinger's six month prison sentence for man slaughter and to make this song even more relevant students can compare this event to the recent death of Trayvon Martin. The other Dylan song is “The Death of Emmitt Till,” which is a about the more famous of the two cases in which Till

flirted with a white women, resulting in him being kidnapped, tortured and killed. Till's death, more than any other single event, helped solidify the resolve of the early Civil Rights movement coalescing into the Montgomery bus boycott, several months later. This case and accompanied song is especially useful in the classroom because Emmitt is likely to be the same age or younger than most students in middle and high school settings.

Among the later dated songs in the collection are a pop and country songs, which demonstrate a move over time toward general acceptance of the Civil Rights movement into mainstream culture. The 1968 song “Abraham, Martin and John” and the 1969 song, “Six White Horses,” are virtually identical in theme and focus on the martyrs whom we lost along the way toward equality and peace. These two songs are great for an anticipatory set, where students need to figure out who the historical figures are in each song. Another interesting point is the omission of Abraham Lincoln in the country song, “Six White Horses,” hinting at the persistent resentment some have about the Civil War in the South, as first seen on the website in songs like, “I’m A Good Old Rebel.”

The collection of songs on Vietnam, weigh more toward the anti-war sentiment reflecting the cultural shift from the WWII collection. The earliest song in the collection is Arlo Guthrie's, “Alice's Restaurant,” which in addition to be humorous describes the process of being drafted and the procedures for selecting preferable candidates all while satirizing the entire war and the ideas behind it. The length of this song is lends itself more to a homework assignment or extra credit project.

“War,” a song by Edwin Starr is akin to the protest songs of the Civil Rights project and contains simple straight-forward lyrics that are easily understood by students. With a similar anger the song “Fortunate Son,” by Credence Clearwater Revival compares the life of a wealthy young man to that of the narrator who has no means to avoid the draft and no way to benefit from the spoils of war. This song is in the soundtrack to dozens of movies about Vietnam and is still a fairly popular song that students might recognize. With the progression of these projects to the recent past more of the songs on the website will be familiar to students making their appeal greater and comfort with these sources a

real asset in reaching students through music.

I did represent in the collection the pro-war song “Fightin' Side of Me,” by Merle Haggard. Haggard himself is the product of Bakersfield California an area populated largely by southern descendants of those who moved out of the Dust Bowl in the 1930's. This message of this country song is in stark contrast to the pop, rock and folk recordings of the 1960's and is an extension of the conservative sentiments first seen in “No, No Joe,” found in the Cold War collection. One song in the collection, “Vietnam Talkin' Blues,” by Johnny Cash is exceptionally modern in its' message of *support the troops* regardless of your opinion of the war. This middle of the road view becomes a persistent theme in music and the wider culture surrounding the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan.

“Ohio” by Crosby, Stills, Nash and Young is about the Kent State shooting deaths of four people who were part of a Vietnam protest by the Ohio national guard. This song highlights a particularly thought provoking moment in American history that is worth probing with students. With the lyrics in hand students can imagine what it would feel like if such an event happened today and people were shot dead in the United States by the military.

The later dated songs in the collection deal with the aftermath of Vietnam and the lives of veterans as they cope with readjusting to normal society. “Sam Stone,” by John Prine is an incredibly depressing song about a veteran who is injured during the war and develops a drug dependency that destroys his family life and ultimately kills him. On par with any poem about Vietnam this song underlines the problems veterans faced returning home to a country that largely did not support them nor provide adequate services for the needs created by the experience of war.

Currently the final collection on the website is the War on Terror collection, which covers the 9/11 terrorist attacks, the war in Afghanistan, Iraq and the issue that stem from these conflicts. Many of these songs should be very familiar to students and when used in a classroom offer a new view of something they know of outside of school. Toby Kieth's “Courtesy of the Red, White and Blue,” is a perfect example of the anger and initial reaction of many to the 9/11 terror attacks. The song is

unapologetic and illustrates the mindset of Americans at the time as we entered Afghanistan and began an international open-war on terrorism. As the present of 9/11 faded into memory, the message of the song lost relevance to many people and students might find the song a bit jingoistic depending on their political views. Even the old anti-Vietnam crowd initially supported the War on Terror as with Neil Young who released, "Let's Roll," in 2001. I put this song in the collection because, "Let's Roll" became a motto of sorts after being uttered on the last phone call of a man who helped successfully stop a hijacked plane on 9/11 from reaching the intended target.

Once the 9/11 attacks were a year in the past, the first real divergence of opinions began to show in popular culture criticizing the developing war in Afghanistan and the social-political changes that followed. The Black Eyed Peas released the song, "Where Is The Love?" questioning the usefulness of the War on Terror while simultaneously highlighting the problems in our own country that go unresolved time after time. In opposition to this new attitude country artist Darryl Worley wrote "Have You Forgotten?" asking people to remember the day of 9/11 and how they felt watching the twin towers of New York City crash to the ground.

Unlike Afghanistan, the invasion of Iraq sparked immediate opposition and for many years, some of which students may remember the United States fought two national wars and a global war on terrorism. Such tasks put Americans at the center of a society in a state of constant war, prompting Neil Young to write "Living With War." This song explores the phenomenon of not merely engaging in war, or even living through a war, but the idea of always being at war, consuming media attention and determining politics. The two wars, the Patriot Act, drone planes, Abu Grabe prison, Guantanamo Bay, the hunt for Osama Bin Ladin and Saddam Hussein, the threat of WMD's, the shoe bomber, the national threat level, were all facets of a society still very much present in 2013.

This concludes the extent of the collection initially planned for the website, only a fraction of the songs in the collection are mentioned and only then addressing the first layers of analysis that

teacher and student can apply to these songs when used as historical sources. It is in these true often unpolished testaments of ordinary folks that the fuller story of America is realized in combination with the speeches, political cartoons, maps and poems of editorial perfection. The use of music also shifts the focus of history away from the leaders at the top to the people who put those leaders into power.

### **Connecting to Research**

The music found on the website project offer a multisensory experience with many pathways to learning. In addition to the auditory music, videos are often provided with useful visuals and printed lyrics are posted unless the song is still copy-written, in which case links are provided. As such the sources provided create a diverse learning experience accessible to the many varied types of learners. In fact, most of the songs on the website appeal directly to five of Howard Gardner's multiple intelligences. The first and most obvious is musical or rhythmic intelligence, which is largely unused in the social studies classroom, with projects like these being the exception.<sup>3</sup> The accompanied videos were chosen for their usefulness in the classroom and appeal to the visual learner.<sup>4</sup> Students who have a well developed verbal or linguistic intelligence will appreciate the lyrics and cadence of the music in much the same fashion as these students would enjoy poetry more than others.<sup>5</sup> The more personal songs in the collection, like "Sam Stone," or "The Death of Emmett Till," will resonate with students with strong interpersonal intelligence and furthermore coupled with the music in the collection evoking spiritual matters the ethical and moral richness of the music will appeal to those with a well developed existential intelligence.<sup>6,7</sup>

Further exploring the use of the videos on the website educational research demonstrates that visual aids increase the ability of students to recall information versus having no visual aids at all.<sup>8</sup>

---

3 Howard Gardner, *Frames of Mind: the theory of multiple intelligences* (NYC: Basic Books, 2011) 105.

4 Gardner, 179.

5 Gardner, 77.

6 Gardner, 251.

7 Gardner, 282.

8 John Medina, *Brain Rules: 12 principles for surviving and thriving at work, home and school* (Seattle: Pear Press, 2008) 225.

Also, merely having multiple sensory inputs of the same information through auditory and visual sources increases understanding.<sup>9</sup> Between Howard Gardner and John Medina's work *Brain Rules: 12 principles for surviving and thriving at work, home and school*, it becomes evident that music presented in the full visual, audio and written context provide students with a more accessible, useful and memorable source of information than written speeches, overly elaborate poetry or simple political cartoons. The music compiled on these website collections provides a multisensory experience, exposes students to the views of the unspoken majority of American and expands the source base of the entire social studies curriculum.

On the deepest level of understanding that a social studies teacher covets to capture in his or her students is the unparalleled human element, getting students to reach beyond their own time and connect with voices long since past in common experience. Qualitative research demonstrates found that such an above and beyond goal for a teacher is attainable through the use of popular music in the classroom.<sup>10</sup> White and McCormick conclude that student disinterest in social studies because of its remoteness can be combated by the integration of popular music presenting individual voices into the monolithic events that seem otherwise un-relatable.<sup>11</sup> In general White and McCormick found students to be more receptive to music as a source over the traditional social studies material, especially popular music, such as the works found on the website database.

### **Summation**

The wiki style website project at the center of the last portion of this thesis is designed to offer teachers a new source base for the social studies curriculum, organized by corresponding subject projects. Furthermore, it will be opened up to public editing for future dialogue between teachers and other educators as it grows and develops with every new editor. The American vernacular music

---

9 Medina, 197.

10 Cameron White, Susan McCormick, "The Message in the Music: Popular Culture and Teaching in Social Studies" *Social Studies* May/June 2006 vol 97 issue 3 pgs 122-127.

11 White, McCormick, 125.

present on the website is the result of two semesters of research on the American music tradition and the thoughtful application of this knowledge to the NYS social studies curriculum. Every source is researched to be authentic to the time of its lyrics and not a work nostalgia. The website offers visual aids, written lyrics and the music itself as a multisensory source of historical information, the usefulness of which is supported by prior research.<sup>1213</sup> Most importantly the opportunity for students to experience genuine emotional discovery of the past is found on this website project, that research demonstrates is often achieved through music.<sup>14</sup>

---

12 Howard Gardner, *Frames of Mind: the theory of multiple intelligences* (NYC: Basic Books, 2011).

13 John Medina, *Brain Rules: 12 principles for surviving and thriving at work, home and school* (Seattle: Pear Press, 2008).

14 Cameron White, Susan McCormak, "The Message in the Music: Popular Culture and Teaching in Social Studies" *Social Studies* May/June 2006 vol 97 issue 3 pgs 122-127.

## **Works Cited**

Lomax, Alan. *The folk songs of North America*. Gardern City, NY: Doubleday & Company, 1960.

Lomax, John and Alan. *Folk Song USA*. NYC: Duell, Sloan and Pierce, 1947.

Gardner, Howard. *Frames of Mind: the theory of multiple intelligences*. NYC: Basic Books, 2011.

Medina, John. *Brain Rules: 12 principles for surviving and thriving at work, home and school*. Seattle: Pear Press, 2008.

White, Cameron; McCormak, Susan. "The Message in the Music: Popular Culture and Teaching in Social Studies." *Social Studies* May/June 2006 vol 97 issue 3 pgs 122-127.

Dean, Ceri B., Marzano, Robert J. *Classroom instruction that works [electronic resource] : research-based strategies for increasing student achievement*. Alexandria, Va. : ASCD, c2012.