

Racism, Science, and Music

Issues and Music and Sciences

Dr. David John Baker

HU Berlin, Winter 2020

Outline

1. Preface
2. Why this is important for the music science researcher
3. How to learn more about these issues
4. Steps the Society for Music Perception and Cognition* has taken to address these issues

* North American Professional Organization on Music + Science Research

Preface

Preface

→ Issues we are about to discuss come from well established fields from scholars who are experts in race, gender, queer, colonial studies

→ Seriously engaging in these issues means seriously engaging with the many voices of people who have come before this and their ideas

→ Many people have not had to think about these issues until recently (an example of privilege) and thinking about them for the first time might be uncomfortable.

→ SMPC board are not experts, do not claim authority, and are in process of finding expertise we need to professionally address these issues

What is racism?

Black Lives Matter Movement

→ This year there was international attention on the USA surrounding the unjust police killings of black people

This list includes, but is not limited to...

George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, Eric Garner, Trayvon Martin, Michael Brown, Tamir Rice, Walter Scott, Alton Sterling, Philando Castile, Stephon Clark



Black Lives Matter Movement

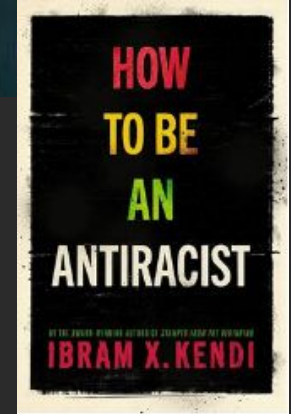
Issues faced by those who are oppressed do not go away overnight

Related among other things related to major issues such as:

- Housing Practices
- Fair Hiring Opportunities
- College Admission
- Justice System
- Police Brutality
- Focus of Scientific Research

What is racism?

- Need to be on same page with language
- These are cultural, not scientific questions
- Not all questions are scientific
- Move away from idea that for something to be racist it has to be overt, harmful act



Ibram X. Kendi, *How to be Anti-racist*

- **Racist Idea:** any idea that suggests one racial group is inferior or superior to another racial group in any way
- **Anti Racist Idea:** any idea that suggest the racial groups are equal in all their apparent differences-- that there is nothing right or wrong with any racial group
- **Racist Policy:** any measure that produces or sustains racial inequality between racial groups
- **Anti-Racist Policy:** any measure that produces or sustains racial equity between racial groups

Reflection

Are there policies that you encounter in your daily life, which might be racist, even if unintentionally so?

This could be course content, material covered, *etc.*

The use of frames that prioritize European and white viewpoints

Racism and Science in Society

Reminder!

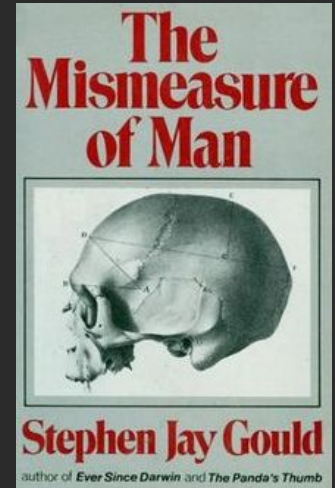
- Not just intellectual thought experiments
- Issues discussed here are issues faced in life of real people
- ***If you haven't seen it, does not mean it doesn't happen*** (naive realism)
- We live in a society that has a history of being unjust
- Going to focus on recent issues, focusing on the recency of everything that has happened in 2020
- Avoid issues of this at large and look within science...

→ How has society been racist relating to science?

Mismeasure of Man

→ Documents history of scientists attempting to justify belief that there are innate differences between races using various forms of measurement

- For example: phrenology and brain size
- Body morphology used to always rationalize differences in favor of white culture (white supremacy)
- Those interested in subject were eugenicists
- Same groups of people were involved with implementation of IQ based testing
- Used in forced sterilization of people
- Used to justify differences in performance across race
- Dependent on longstanding misconceptions about race as biologically a priori concept



Ideas with phrenology and cognitive testing are racist if they assert racial differences exist

Phrenology and its Legacy

Franz Joseph Gall (1758–1828):

first argued that the mind was an aggregate of specific physical spots in the brain (with specific “organs” for love, the tendency to commit crimes, courage, *etc.*). Collected the skulls of individuals known to exhibit each trait.

Johann Spurzheim (1776-1832):

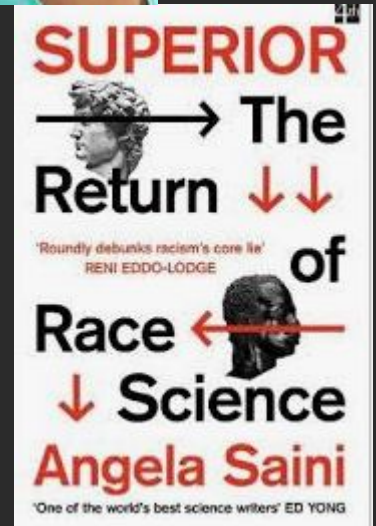
a student of Gall, would continue this work, and would coin the term “phrenology”.

Paul Broca (1824–1888):

Classified races into different species, and argued that they were mentally and genetically different.

Superior: The Return of Race Science

- Recent book by Angela Saini debunking idea that there are different genetic origins of the different races
- Stories of superiority/inferiority are often selectively chosen by the dominant group to justify poor treatment of others
 - Australian Aboriginals -- culture eradicated
 - Neanderthals -- swap on narrative
 - Initial Settlers in England
 - Caste system in India
- Problem is imposition of value structure on a society that does not share that value structure



What happens in these books?

- Society (those in power) 'move the goalposts' to enforce white supremacy
- Gould
 - Selective reporting of what skulls to measure for phrenology
 - Change statistical analyses to fit analysis
 - Base questions of IQ on culturally determinant factors
 - Use ideas to rationalize eugenics
- Saini
 - Justify removal of families with claims of science
 - Support of eugenics scientists in USA post WWII
 - Forced sterilizations
 - Scant biological or anthropological evidence for separate race categories
- Scientists in position of power use established methods of power to advocate for positions that further claims of superiority and inferiority

Break

Racism in Music (and Science)

Racism in Music (and Science)

- Issues related to music are not unique
- Can find this in music theory
 - Fetis
 - Schenker
 - White Racial Frame (Ewell, 2020)
- Can find this in music science
 - Seashore and Eugenics (Devaney, 2019)
 - Psychometrics

François-Joseph Fétis

Starting simply...

- François-Joseph Fétis
- French Music Theorist
- 25 March 1784 – 26 March 1871

Tonalité was in fact the site of a remarkable number of cultural anxieties, worries about the future of music, but also (and perhaps surprisingly) about race. For Fétis, there was a strong anthropological dimension to *tonalité*: he believed that different human societies were attracted to different pitch repertoires because of their different mental capacities, which were moreover a function of “cerebral conformation.”³⁴

Fétis asserted that primitive (non-Western) societies were limited to simpler scales because of their simpler brain structures, while the more complex psychological organizations of Indo-Europeans permitted them to realize, over historical time, the full musical potential of *tonalité*; his theories were similar in their biological determinism to the racial theories of Gobineau. His inquiries into non-Western music advanced the academic agenda of Orientalism, an ambitious international attempt to research the languages, social organizations, sciences, and arts of non-Western societies, those under European rule in particular. In its most common forms, this research



From “Tonality” by Bryan Hyer in
Cambridge History of Music Theory
2006

Asserts cultural level group differences based on race...

→ Racist idea

Anti racist conception of this would be to not use tools of one culture to make value judgments about another

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Heinrich Schenker

Heinrich Schenker

- 1868 – 1935
- Music Theory
- Very Popular in North America
- Centre of recent debates

J.S. Bach, *WTC I*, Fugue in D Minor (cf. Fig. 53,5)

156

m. 1 3 5 6 8 9 12 13 15 16 17 18 20

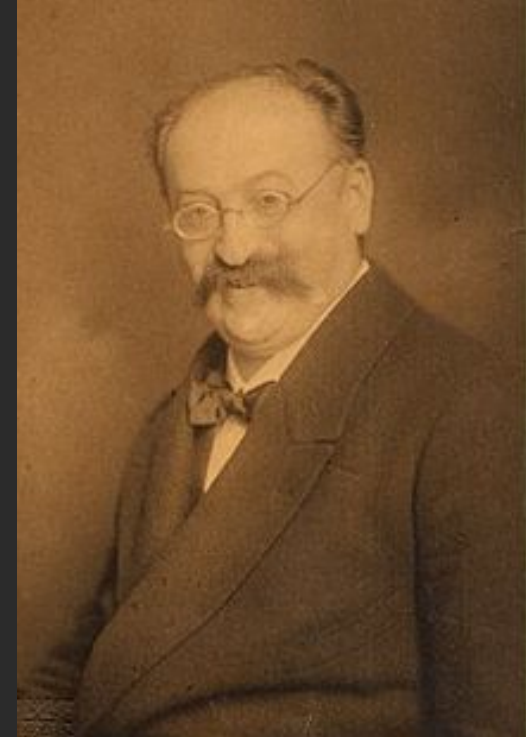
(subject) (answer) (a.)

I II V

m. 21 23 25 26 27 28 33 34 35 37 38 39 40 41 42 43

(s.) (s.) (s.) (s.)

(v) I



THE MASTERWORK IN MUSIC

VOLUME I • 1925

HEINRICH SCHENKER

Heinrich Schenker Recent Attention Ewell, 2020



Music Theory and the White Racial Frame *

Philip A. Ewell

KEYWORDS: Race, whiteness, critical-race studies, music theory, white racial frame

ABSTRACT: For over twenty years, music theory has tried to diversify with respect to race, yet the field today remains remarkably white, not only in terms of the people who practice music theory but also in the race of the composers and theorists whose work music theory privileges. In this paper, a critical-race examination of the field of music theory, I try to come to terms with why this is so. I posit that there exists a “white racial frame” in music theory that is structural and institutionalized, and that only through a deframing and reframing of this white racial frame will we begin to see positive racial changes in music theory.

DOI: 10.30535/mto.26.2.4

Received June 2019

[PDF text](#) | [PDF examples](#)



Photo by Pascal Perich

Heinrich Schenker Recent Attention Ewell, 2020



a journal of the *Society for Music Theory*

MTO Home

Mu

Philip

KEYW

ABSTR

[4.2.3] About blacks Schenker had the lowest of opinions. When speaking about self-governance, Schenker said about blacks, incredulously, “even negroes proclaim that they want to govern themselves because they, too, can achieve it” (*SDO*, DLA 59.930/10, transcr. Ian Bent and Lee Rothfarb, trans. Lee Rothfarb), thus acknowledging his belief that blacks, incapable of self-governance, are the lowest form of human being—in fact, something less than a human being in Schenker’s understanding. Schenker disparages the music of blacks, namely, “negro music” and jazz ([1930] 2014, 77), as well as negro spirituals, claiming that they were “completely falsified, dishonest expropriation of European music” (*SDO*, OJ 4/4, January 1931, transcr. Marko Deisinger, trans. William Drabkin). It seems that Schenker liked these negro spirituals inasmuch as he

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A photograph showing a close-up of a person's hands playing a stringed instrument, possibly a guitar or a similar fretted instrument. The person is wearing a blue and white checkered shirt.

Photo by Pascal Perich

Problems

System Highlights Features It Values

Does not capture features of other systems

Overt claims of white supremacy...

J.S. Bach, *WTC I*, Fugue in D Minor (cf. Fig. 53,5)

156

m. 1 3 5 6 8 9 12 13 15 16 17 18 20

1

(subject) (answer) (a.) (s.)

I II V

m. 21 23 25 26 27 28 33 34 35 37 38 39 40 41 42 43

(a.) (s.) (s.) (s.)

(V) I

Questions

What musical features are not captured in Schenkerian graphs? What values are not captured using this system?

J.S. Bach, *WTC I*, Fugue in D Minor (cf. Fig. 53,5)

156

m. 1 3 5 6 8 9 12 13 15 16 17 18 20

1

(subject) (answer) (a.) (s.) (a.)

I II V

m. 21 23 25 26 27 28 33 34 35 37 38 39 40 41 42 43

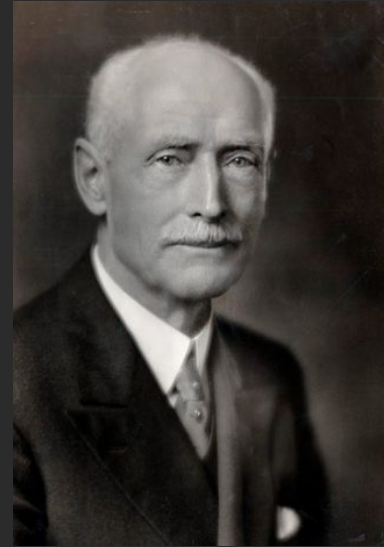
(a.) (s.) (s.) (s.)

(V) I

Carl Seashore and Eugenics

Carl Seashore

- Tests of Musical Ability
- First Psychometrics test for music
- First Published in 1919
- Also a Eugenecist



Carl Seashore In Joanna Devaney 2019

Seashore quote:



The approach to the problem of inheritance of musical talent, from the point of view of eugenics, divides itself naturally into five stages or tasks: (1) the analysis of what constitutes musical talent and the isolation of measurable factors; (2) the development and standardization of methods of measurement and rating of each of these talents under control; (3) the actual field work of measuring sufficiently large numbers of generations in selected family groups; (4) the interpretation of such results in terms of biological principles of heritable factors; (5) interpretation and dissemination of established information for eugenic guidance.⁴

How could this go wrong?

Psychometric Tool For One Specification for Music

Eugenicist Ideas

+ Unjust Societal Factors

Work of G. B Johnson

G. B Johnson

Tests and Measurements Department

Conducted by PETER W. DYKEMA
*Professor of Music Education, Teachers College, Columbia University,
New York City*

MUSICAL TALENT AND THE NEGRO

GUY B. JOHNSON
*Research Associate In Social Science
University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, N. C.*

THERE HAS long existed a popular belief to the effect that the Negro has an unusual natural talent for music. Does this belief rest on facts? In an effort to pave the way for an answer to this question, the writer gave the Seashore music talent tests to 3350 Negroes.**

* University of North Carolina Press.

** As most music supervisors already know, these tests were devised several years ago by Professor Carl E. Seashore, of the University of Iowa. They are available on six Columbia double-faced phonograph records, are standardized, and are adapted to both individual and group use. Professor Seashore tested large numbers of white people of different educational levels—fifth grade, eighth grade, and college students—in order to work out norms and tables of rank with which other individuals or groups could be compared.

There are six of the Seashore tests, namely, sense of pitch, sense of intensity, sense of time, sense of rhythm, sense of consonance, and tonal memory. The pitch test attempts to determine by a series of 100 trials the least difference which a given person can detect between the pitches of two tones. Some of the trials are very easy, the dif-

ference in pitch being a half tone. The difficulty progresses until the difference becomes less than 1/103 of a tone. Each listener must decide in each trial whether the second tone is higher or lower than the first tone and mark his score card H or L accordingly. A detailed description of each test is impossible here, but the principle is the same in the others as in the pitch test, except perhaps the consonance test. There the basis of judgment is somewhat different. The listener must decide, whether one combination of tones sounds "better" or "worse" than another. Partly because of the controversial nature of consonance and partly because of lack of time, this test was not given to very many Negro subjects. It is worth stating incidentally, however, that the scores of the 100 Negro college students who did take the consonance test gave a distribution practically identical with the Seashore norms for whites on that test.

A thorough discussion of the various statistical aspects of the results of this testing would take far more space than this report will permit. The results will therefore be

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tion it was decided that these Negro groups should be tested and allowances made later for their relatively lower school advancement in comparison with whites. A thorough discussion of the various statistical aspects of the results of this testing would take far more space than this report will permit. The results will therefore be

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More Race Based Music Science

The Musical Ability of the Negro

By YALE S. NATHANSON

Department of Psychology, University of Pennsylvania

THE expression of opinion based on sentiment rather than on actual scientific finding is a frequent and serious offense in matters concerning racial and national differences. The champion of the "Nordic Cause" is not alone in building up an elaborate array of evidence to prove superiority for his "chosen people."

The Negro, too, has his defenders, and when the anthropometrist points out the physical characteristics, so

his soul—who has not seen the small Negro boy dancing on the street corner for the amusement of a crowd? The Negro cannot resist the rhythm of music, it is alleged; perhaps this is true, but likewise is it true that the young of all races react to the rhythm of music, and not only do all human infants respond to music but the Chimpanzee, as well, nods and sways in accompaniment to the note of bow or trumpet.

A SUMMARY OF NEGRO SCORES ON THE SEASHORE MUSIC TALENT TESTS

GUY B. JOHNSON

Institute for Research in Social Science, University of North Carolina

In 1927-28 the writer applied the Seashore music talent tests¹ in colleges and graded schools in North Carolina, and Virginia. The results of this work, together parisons with the white norms worked out by ven below in a very abbreviated form. The folary remarks are relevant here.

used were the phonographic Seashore "Measures nt." Because of lack of time the consonance robably the least satisfactory of the tests, was

re unselected, the class-room group being the unit of the groups varied from six to ninety persons. white norms were based on tests of fifth-grade, d college students in Iowa. Negro college stu- sumed to be mature and comparable with college ould Negro fifth- and eighth-grade pupils be com-

Learning More About These Issues

Reading List

- Phil Ewell on Music Theory's White Racial Frame
 - Kendi
 - Ahmed
- Superior, Angela Saini
- Mismeasure of Man, Stephen J. Gould
- List of Resources By Music Theory
 - Anti Racist Bibliography
- Johanna Devaney on Seashore
- Work of Project Spectrum

SMPC Actions

Actions SMPC is taking

1. Work to document members' demographic information when they join or renew, enabling SMPC to assess and address problems of representation in our membership.
2. Establish a mentorship committee. This standing committee will work to ensure that all trainee members are provided professional support during their training.
3. Establish an anti-racism committee. This standing committee will continue the work of the current ad-hoc committee.
4. Transform one existing Member-At-Large board position into an Equity Officer position. The Equity Officer, elected on the same schedule as one of the Member-At-Large positions, will also serve as chair of the anti-racism committee.
5. Allocate yearly funds (equal to or greater than the amount allocated to the previous year's SMPC student travel awards) to programs developed by the mentorship and anti-racism committees.
6. Dedicate a special session at the next in-person conference to discuss issues of race within music science.
7. Develop and approve a members' code of conduct.