



UNIVERSITY OF HELSINKI

<https://helda.helsinki.fi>

Between Activism and White Saviourism : Unpacking the Racial Dynamics of Multiculturalism in Ethnomusicology and World Music

Ramstedt, Kim; Laine, Miia

Ramstedt, Kim; Välimäki, Susanna; Ahlsved, Kaj; Mononen, Sini

2025-06-20

<http://hdl.handle.net/10138/598540>

Ramstedt, K & Laine, M 2025, Between Activism and White Saviourism : Unpacking the Racial Dynamics of Multiculturalism in Ethnomusicology and World Music. in K Ramstedt, S Välimäki, K Ahlsved & S Mononen (eds), Music, Research, and Activism : Prospects and Projects in Northern Europe. Intellect, Bristol, pp. 3–16.

Downloaded from Helda, University of Helsinki institutional repository. <https://helda.helsinki.fi>
This is an electronic reprint of the original article.
This reprint may differ from the original in pagination and typographic detail.
Please cite the original version.

1.

Between Activism and White Saviourism: Unpacking the Racial Dynamics of Multiculturalism in Ethnomusicology and World Music

Kim Ramstedt and Miia Laine

Kim Ramstedt is a researcher and educator specialized in mediation and power dynamics in music. His current research explores how the category of race is constructed and addressed in research and other knowledge production around music. As a White non-disabled cis-man studying systems of oppression, Ramstedt acknowledges he has no experiential knowledge on the topic. Rather than analysing and possibly contributing to the normalization of the damage and distress caused by structures he benefits from, Ramstedt interrogates privilege and how it not only creates injustice but often works to obstruct efforts of dismantling it.

***Miia Laine** is a radio producer, DJ, cultural worker, and educator based in Helsinki whose practice revolves around the themes of migration, diaspora, language, and the politics of music. She graduated from Freie Universität Berlin (BA in Political Science) and SOAS University London (MA in Music in Development). Coming from a social science and ethnomusicology background, her work in radio and the wider arts seeks to critically examine and redress existing power dynamics through stories of people's lives.*

It is popularly believed that music can further mutual respect and understanding among different groups of people or even serve as a tool that can enhance diversity and equality. Particularly on the musical stages and spaces that are organized around the ideology of multiculturalism, music is often used explicitly with this purpose in mind. However, if power hierarchies and positional differences between people are not considered, celebrating differences and putting otherness on display through music can effectively also serve the opposite purpose; it can essentialize, exotify, and enhance racialized power hierarchies. In fact, we argue that people in positions of power and privilege would be naive to assume that listening, performing, or promoting music associated with oppressed or disadvantaged groups are in themselves acts that advance the interest of these people.

Nevertheless, this attitude still dominates in the Global North knowledge production about music and ethnic minorities. As several scholars, beginning with sociologist and civil rights activist W. E. B. Du Bois, have implied, although minorities racialized as non-White, and particularly Black people, are hypervisible in media and academia in that they are the subject of discourse, they are epistemically excluded and much less frequently heard (see e.g. Collins 2006; Du Bois 1940; hooks 1989; Kajikawa 2020; Settles et al. 2019; Stoever 2016). The media presence and sizable share of attention in academic literature is easily mistaken for inclusion, or even for justice. As music scholar Stephen Amico (2020: 7) notes, specifically regarding the discipline of ethnomusicology, in its quest to expose exploitative power in the world of music, the field has conflated a one-dimensional understanding of 'representation' with 'reparation'. What is more, research that

deals with people racialized as non-White, or the ‘global majority’ (Campbell-Stephens 2021: n.pag.), is frequently ‘damage-centered’ (Tuck 2009: n.pag.) in that it draws attention to the research subjects’ pain in an effort ‘to hold those in power accountable for their oppression’. This kind of research conducted from a dominant identity position provides at best ‘recognition’ (Lentin and Titley 2011: 19) for minority cultures, and at worst reinforces asymmetrical power hierarchies in academia and normalizes the pain of Black, Indigenous, and communities of colour, defining them singularly through this lens (Tuck 2009).

In this chapter, we take issue with how knowledge about music and racial difference is produced in the predominantly White academic institutions and cultural industries that we have been engaged with as scholars, educators, musicians, producers, and journalists in Northern Europe. We draw attention particularly to the discipline of ethnomusicology and the genre category of ‘world music’ that in their pathological relationship with people of the global majority materialize the ideology of multiculturalism. We start by summarizing some of the key criticisms directed towards multiculturalism as the dominant political strategy for managing intergroup relations in the Global North. We link this criticism to ethnomusicological research and discuss further how perceived activism and a White belief in ‘being good’ (Applebaum 2010: n.pag.) both within ethnomusicology and ‘world music’ have restricted progress rather than advanced social justice within the field. Finally, we discuss the need for more explicit anti-racist and activist research methods and cultural practices that could yield more substantial change towards equity in music.

Multiculturalism and music

Although multiculturalism has been employed in many different and sometimes contradictory contexts, becoming almost an ‘empty signifier’ (Gunew 2004: 19), there are some core features it has been criticized for that are relevant to knowledge production concerning music. Despite what the name will have you believe, and although the concept has been employed explicitly as a strategy against racism, multiculturalism has done little to redress racial inequality. Rather, as an ideology mainly concerned with a White capacity to manage difference, multiculturalism has

continued to centre Whiteness, leaving racial injustices mostly unchallenged (Gordon and Newfield 1996: 4).

One central critique against multiculturalism has been its ahistorical conceptualization of difference, which has meant discarding race as a historically and socially formed category in exchange for an imagined cultural equality between people (Mills 2007; Young 2007). As pioneering critical race theorist and philosopher Charles W. Mills judiciously argues, this colour-blindness of multiculturalism, effectively denies any real-world effects of race and refuses to acknowledge ‘the advantages of White privilege that race has brought about’ (2007: 103). Diversity, as it is conceptualized within the framework of multiculturalism, has been limited to individualized uniqueness, personal differences, customs, and rituals isolated from links to any historical realities of oppression (see e.g. Ahmed 2000; Hage 1998; Tuori 2007).

Emphasizing ‘cultural differences’ over ‘positional differences’ (see Young 2007: n.pag.) reinforces normalization in that the primary participants in the debates over a perceived difference are those already in positions of power. Difference can then either be discarded as incompatible with the dominant culture or valued as a consumable product, that ‘livens up’ (Ahmed 2000: 117) the ordinary or the mainstream. In this spirit, the rhetoric of multiculturalism often incorporates analogies to consumable and ingestible items like food, comparing differences to spices that add flavour to society (Ahmed 2000) or using metaphors like ‘stew’ (Hage 1998) or ‘soup’ (Tuori 2007) to describe the intermingling of people. Rather than leading to more equity, the emphasis on culture and an exaggeration of their inherent differences cultivate othering epistemologies, which we also identify in knowledge production around music that explicitly seeks to further intergroup dialogue.

The discipline of ethnomusicology has often been defined as the study of music in or as culture (see e.g. Herndon and McLeod 1982; Merriam 1964; Nettle 2010), signalling the weight of the concept of culture within the discipline. At the same time, according to Timothy Rice (2014: 65), ethnomusicologists have not been overly concerned with how exactly culture is defined. In fact, literature that, as Henry Kingsbury (1997) notes, relies on simplified and outdated definitions of culture, is frequently used as course literature (see also Ramstedt 2020b). This preoccupation

with an undefined idea(l) of ‘culture’ emphasizes differences – that which is explicitly more ‘cultural’, is automatically more valuable. Just as cultural difference within the framework of multiculturalism has become valued as a commodity, so has research that highlights ‘difference’ (Agawu 2003) or ‘Otherness’ (see Amico 2020) become a goal in itself. It is as if there is a belief that the more difference ethnomusicology manages to uncover in the world of music, the more justice it has achieved.

Similarly, the dramatization of cultural difference that guides multiculturalism as an ideology can also be identified in what has been called ethnomusicology’s ‘commercial doppelgänger’ (Kheshti 2015: 6), namely the genre category of world music. Like ethnomusicology, world music has revolved around putting high value on the vague concept of culture. While ethnomusicology studies music as culture, world music as a genre brings together non-western musics that are ‘assumed to be – or constructed to be – “cultural”’ (Taylor 2007: 162). We will elaborate on the consequences of this shortly, but first, let us take a closer look at the activist identity of ethnomusicology.

Activism as identity

The impact and influence of colonialism on how research knowledge within the discipline of ethnomusicology is organized is hard to dispute. Danielle Brown candidly sums this up in her open letter on racism in music studies: a predominantly White institution researching by and large People of Colour ‘*is and can be nothing other than a colonialist and imperialist enterprise*’ (2020: n.pag., original emphasis). How the discipline is most commonly taught and practised, it has not yet come to terms with its colonial legacy and the biases and inequalities this systematically perpetuates (see e.g. Chávez and Skelchy 2019). In our own working environment in the Nordic countries, known for their refusal to acknowledge any relevance of coloniality and race relations in the region (Loftsdóttir and Jensen 2012), we have frequently witnessed established scholars denying the existence of racism within the field and refusing to acknowledge the colonial history of the discipline. When the topic of racism is discussed in disciplinary contexts, White scholars in the name of ‘intersectionality’

turn the conversation to other forms of (often insignificant) discrimination or even invoke the absurd and ahistorical idea of reverse racism that they have ostensibly experienced in their work with global majority populations.

This inability to address and acknowledge positional difference and racial power dynamics in ethnomusicology is directly connected to the ideology of multiculturalism and an understanding of racism as a personal bias rather than a systematic form of disadvantage enabled by White supremacy. Additionally, we believe that an oppositional and perceived activist identity has shielded the discipline from honest and rigorous self-criticism.

Like multiculturalism, which after the Second World War was perceived as a political correction to a general Euro-hegemony (Mills 2007: 90), modern ethnomusicology developed its disciplinary identity during the same period primarily in opposition to musicology (Bohlman 2008; Nettl 2010), which had focused on the musical traditions of Europe. In challenging this hegemony and advocating for a much-needed expansion of the musical values and aesthetics that dominated universities in the Global North, ethnomusicology established itself as the voice of dissent and opposition (Bohlman 2008), which in Europe also included institutional marginalization (see Nooshin 2008). Within US university structures, ethnomusicology slowly but surely secured its institutional position, still evidenced today by the dominance and influence of US scholarship within the field, but the disciplinary identity as the 'Other' of music research has persisted everywhere, becoming something of a priori political position. Musicologist Lars Berglund (2017), for example, suggests that ethnomusicologists in Sweden not only experience a disciplinary alterity vis-à-vis prototypical musicology but have also felt an affinity with their research subjects who are perceived to be marginalized.

This oppositional and political dimension of the discipline is explicitly communicated by prominent ethnomusicologist Philip Bohlman (2008: 111), who notes that for him ethnomusicology is 'historically and traditionally' an activist discipline. According to Bohlman, ethnomusicology has the potential to give 'a voice to the voiceless' and to 'represent the world's culture to those who hold power' (2008: 97–98) – something he contends that, after

the turn of the millennium, is more important than ever. Similar sentiments are expressed by several ethnomusicologists in Finland in a special journal issue celebrating the 30-year anniversary of the Finnish Society for Ethnomusicology founded in 1974 (Järviluoma 2005; Kurkela 2005; Moisala 2005). Helmi Järviluoma suggests that ‘active’ can be used as a keyword to describe the Finnish Society for Ethnomusicology around the turn of the 1970s, listing an impressive number of different projects and avenues that its members have pursued with the aim to ‘disseminate information about the world’s music cultures’ (2005: 61, translation added) in accordance with the society’s bylaws. However, as Pirkko Moisala (2005) notes, up to the turn of the millennium, there has been little that theoretically and methodologically differentiates ‘ethnomusicological research’ in Finland from other forms of music research. It has instead been distinguished primarily through the object of study. While musicology has focused largely on the art music tradition of Europe, it has marked any other object of study in Finland as ethnomusicological. According to Moisala (2005), the ‘irrational’ animosity that has plagued (at least until 2005) both musicology and ethnomusicology is mostly rooted in academic politics and in a struggle for resources.

This is not to say that ethnomusicology has been devoid of any self-critique. On the contrary, as pioneering ethnomusicologist Bruno Nettl (2010: 54–55) notes, more than many other disciplines, critiquing the field has been an integral part of ethnomusicology’s disciplinary identity. Following the so-called representational, constructive, and performative turns since the 1990s, this has also included addressing coloniality within the discipline itself and its asymmetrical power structures (see e.g. Amico 2020; Brown 2020; Chávez and Skelchy 2019; Kingsbury 1997; Mackinlay 2015; Nooshin 2008; Witzleben 1997). However, as Amico (2020: 9) notes, the discipline is not defined by its ‘cutting edge’ but in pragmatic and utilitarian artefacts like job descriptions, syllabi, and textbooks, where these conversations are lacking. There is also reason to believe that much potentially cutting-edge ethnomusicological scholarship never succeeds in overcoming certain institutional politics and structures. Scholars interested in addressing the structural power dynamics and racializing methodologies inherent in ethnomusicology may experience discomfort (see Kivinen and Ramstedt in this volume)

in working against the grain and, like Danielle Brown (2020) cited above, choose to leave the toxic environment and work outside its disciplinary structures. Additionally, there is evidence that people representing the global majority never even enter the field due to its hostile environment (see e.g. Fox 2020).

Ethnomusicology has remained a rather isolated and autonomous area of research, ‘immune to developments in related disciplines’ (Kingsbury 1997: 243) and lacking even in ‘intertextual references’ to works within the discipline itself (Rice 2010: 321). Rather than advancing equity within the field, critical concepts and theories have become abstracted and rhetorically repurposed, legitimizing even the most problematic aspects of the discipline. Luis Chávez and Russell P. Skelchy (2019: 116) discuss this in relation to the concept of decolonization (see also Tan 2021) and we see it evidently in how field research as a methodology has developed throughout the history of modern ethnomusicology. Upon realizing the neocolonial implications in a methodology constructed primarily around the idea of White researchers travelling to remote locations for the purpose of collecting information about racialized others, the method became reconceptualized as a process where researchers study themselves and their own processes of transformation in meetings with the music of Others. This rhetorical reconfiguration has done little to change the underlying racialized power hierarchies that the practice supports. The solipsism of the discipline is also evidenced by the fact that ethnomusicologists are rarely cited in other disciplines (see Guilbault 2014).

Following Indigenous studies and educational research scholar Eve Tuck (2009), this gives us reasons to ask whether the activist identity and trust in change that informs ethnomusicological research actually advances equity. According to Tuck (2009: 414), research in and on distressed communities is dominated by a ‘theory of change’ that assumes ‘persecutors’ can through the process of research be held accountable, but does it actually work and is it worth the long-term costs for these communities? In assuming that their research about the music of or in racialized communities is in itself a form of activism and work for social justice, White ethnomusicologists position themselves as ‘being good’ (Applebaum 2010), which evades responsibility and avoids accountability. Following critical Whiteness studies and

education scholar Barbara Applebaum's (2010) theorization of White complicity, rather than assuming that a 'theory of change' or activist identity in research will yield progress, scholars should be vigilant and accept critique, particularly from outside of the field and anti-racist activism. Instead of asking 'what can I do?', which encourages heroism and White narcissism, a more purposeful question would be 'what needs to be done?' (Applebaum 2010: 5). Interestingly, we often hear some of the most poignant critiques of ethnomusicology's multicultural epistemology from people outside of the field or by 'lapsed' (Amico 2020: 5) scholars no longer active within the discipline.

Soundtracking the White saviour industrial complex

Returning now to how multiculturalism is manifested within the music industries, we want to discuss some of the damaging effects that the commercialization of 'culture' has had in the world music genre. The concept of 'world music', first introduced among academics in the 1960s as a tool to celebrate musical diversity, was originally regarded as an innocent term that could give a platform to non-western music and acknowledge different musical traditions from all over the world (Feld 2000: 146). Later, after the term was launched as a marketing category within the music industries in 1987, the power dynamics behind the category became increasingly more apparent. White privileged academics and music industry professionals created a category for White audiences to consume the music of a (formerly colonized) Other (Born and Hesmondhalgh 2000; Kheshti 2015). This commodification of difference, or 'corporate multiculturalism', ignores its inherent asymmetrical power dynamics and instead presents a world in which 'racism, sexism, civil rights and other important issues no longer matter' and Otherness can be unproblematically consumed (Taylor 2007: 126). According to anthropologist Roshanak Kheshti (2015: 6), many record companies working within the 'world music culture industry', make efforts to make the music as familiar as possible to consumers, detaching the process of listening from the cultures the music belongs to. The listener is left only with 'pleasure and satisfaction' without a real understanding of the origin and context of the music. We argue that sounds are in this process nevertheless

listened to and appreciated explicitly as representations of culture. Moreover, when culture is the signifier of the value of music, the search for the most authentic form of culture becomes relevant. In the worst-case scenarios, this search for the most authentic, most Other that can be commodified is similar to damage-centred research, where oppression and poverty are consumed by privileged audiences without acknowledgement of the unequal power structures that the production and consumption of the music maintain.

To illustrate this, we wish to look more carefully at two albums produced by US American music producer Ian Brennan. Our intent is not to focus the criticism on Brennan's work specifically, but to shed light on the values and structures rooted in multiculturalism that support and celebrate racializing and damaging narratives. Brennan has produced nearly forty albums categorized as world music, many of which have been nominated for Grammy and other awards. His work can, as such, be seen as representative for values and practices that dominate the world music culture industry.

For several of albums, Brennan has travelled to Africa and Asia to record artists arguably in marginalized and precarious positions. For the album *I Will Not Stop Singing* (2015), which was nominated for a Grammy award, Brennan travelled to Malawi to record prisoners and officers in a maximum-security prison, labelling the performers collectively as the Zomba Prison Project. According to the record label Six Degrees Records, Brennan and his wife, who he frequently works with, were allowed access to the prison in exchange for 'offering a series of classes on violence prevention to inmates and guards' (2022: n.pag.). In the album description, the prison is romanticized and compared to 'a factory from a Dickens novel' and there are more details about the crimes and sentences of the inmates than about the music featured on the album. Brennan becomes a hero in the story who despite 'nearly being detained for taking photos in a forbidden area of the prison' and witnessing 'a prisoner being beaten after trying to escape' was brave enough to enter the facility and through the project even managed to get some inmates 'released from their sentences' (Six Degrees Records 2022: n.pag.).

A year later Brennan produced the album *They Will Kill You, If You Cry* (2016) for a group of people that he collectively

describes as Khmer Rouge Survivors. This means the music is conceptualized primarily and arguably solely through the trauma and distress that the musicians endured during the Khmer Rouge regime of Cambodia in the 1970s. Ian Brennan's own description of the album on the Glitterbeat records website contains, unrelated to the music, stories about suffering and insecurity in Cambodia, noting for example how upon Brennan's arrival in the city of Phnom Penh the 'lifeless body' of an electrocuted utility worker was 'lowered down by rope as if lynched' from a street pole, or how 'a stark naked child ran into the street to urinate' and how 'Russian gangsters openly assassinate each other in the streets and set luxury-cars afire at beachside resorts' (Brennan 2016: n.pag.). Again, the music itself is barely discussed, whereas Brennan is presented as a hero who arrives to rescue it from 'cultural extinction' because ostensibly on the Cambodian pop charts most 'hit songs were in English' (2016: n.pag.). Further highlighting the importance of his rescue mission, Brennan presents what seem to be straw figure fallacies about 'Westerners' who 'claim a culture like Cambodia' is 'not musical' and even consider the 'entire racial group as "passive"' (2016: n.pag.).

Ian Brennan (2021) frequently discusses his music projects as social work, even if he is the one who conceivably benefits most from the projects. As the advocacy collective No White Saviors states, 'equality and charity can not co-exist' (2018: n.pag.). If the projects are conceived as charity and social work, the people who are presumably being helped are not regarded as equals. Even if the albums can provide short-term opportunities for the musicians involved, the artists heard on the records are not treated as individuals. The music is framed unequivocally as a representation of a particular group of people who become essentialized, victimized, and explicitly racialized, whereas Brennan retains agency and benefits from long-term recognition, visibility, funding, access to work and new opportunities, and a career trajectory in the White management of multiculturalism. Both album descriptions discussed above start by centring on Brennan, introducing him as the 'Grammy-winning' producer who offers violence prevention, saves extinct cultures, and authorizes subaltern voices to be heard, while simultaneously emphasizing the several levels of pain and suffering that the

performers experience. The greater the distress and damage that are ascribed to the communities, the bigger the hero who saves them becomes.

Within the multicultural ideology that glorifies extreme difference, albums like the ones described above might be seen to constitute no harm. Rather, the works are celebrated and given awards for their courage and efforts to highlight marginalized people. Taking race seriously as a socially and historically constructed category of positionality, however, we see patterns in how marginalized groups of African and Asian people are represented in Brennan's work and how he as a White American is centred as the saviour. From this perspective, the music becomes a cog in the machinery of the 'White-Savior Industrial Complex' (Cole 2012: n.pag.). According to author and art historian Teju Cole (2012: n.pag.), this system is not about justice, it 'is about having a big emotional experience that validates privilege'. White saviourism in the field of music restricts real work towards equity, such as addressing racism with appropriate anti-racist policies, by applauding the small individual good deeds that construct White people as heroes in the world and in the end mostly advance their careers. The White saviour industrial complex avoids addressing the fact that although Whiteness has caused and keeps the systems in place that maintain the oppression and disadvantages under which the musicians work, it is only visible as a saviour and awarded for allegedly helping the disadvantaged. As funds from purchasing the music are nominally directed towards the cause, listening to the music also becomes an act of charity more than an appreciation of musical ability.

The racial dimensions of world music have been problematized for a long time (e.g. Byrne 1999). In recent years a call to abolish the term 'world music' has regained momentum (Birrell 2012; De Paor Evans 2018; Kalia 2019), and in 2021, the Grammy Awards did just this. The Recording Academy changed the 'Best World Music Album' category to the 'Best Global Music Album', in order to make the category more 'modern and inclusive' and get rid of the 'connotations of colonialism' (Beaumont-Thomas 2020; Odubiyi 2020). Whether a simple name change purges the genre of connotations of colonialism is questionable when the apolitical and ahistorical engagement with the music of racialized others still exists. We argue that

world music or any equivalent name will continue to have this dynamic as long as the ideology of multiculturalism drives these industries.

Towards anti-racism

We have discussed above how the ideology of multiculturalism is represented in the discipline of ethnomusicology in its vague definition of culture and the damaging effects the extension of this epistemology and apolitical celebration of culture has in the field of music. At the same time, privileged (White) professionals who believe they are 'doing good' are celebrated as heroes, rather than accepting accountability and seeking explicitly to advance social justice within their own field. Apparently, as explicit ethnocentric and racist nationalism has become normalized in predominantly White societies, efforts to merely acknowledge (cultural) diversity are considered activism, without any scrutiny of how exactly increasing knowledge of minority cultures contributes to change. These ideas of cultural diversity and multiculturalism might have been progressive 50 years ago, although not if you ask intellectuals and activists of colour from that period, but an earlier generation's progressives have become this generation's reactionaries. The music industries are not only a site of music consumption, but a space where knowledge about race is constructed. How the industries are organized (the 'corporate culture' if you will, see Negus 1999), is indicative of the racial discursive-materiality it upholds. Similarly, the university is not just a place for knowledge production, but also a space of consumption. As Loren Kajikawa (2020: 47, 53) notes with regard to hip-hop scholarship, music departments offer White people a safe space 'to intelligently consume Black pain'.

As areas that deal explicitly with politics of difference and equality, it is alarming how little anti-racist activism and critical race theories inform the practices of institutions involved in ethnomusicology and in the world music genre. Anti-racist educators, scholars, and activists established a long time ago that racism is not only formed around biological heredity but also, and perhaps more often, around perceived cultural differences (see e.g. Balibar and Wallerstein 1991). The term culture is at times nothing more than a surrogate for race and works to hide racial

inequalities, disadvantages, and biases behind a coded language. As most anti-racist educators and activists would attest, we cannot address racism without also engaging with race as a historically and socially formed category of difference and domination. Race makes systems of power visible by attaching it to physical bodies. However, the multicultural ideology that dominates knowledge production around music in Europe often falsely claims that racism can be avoided by merely avoiding the category of race. Anti-racist activists who draw attention to the category of race in discussions around inequalities and disadvantages are at the same time accused of being the ones who sustain racism.

We, the authors of this text, do not have any direct answers to resolving racial inequalities within the field of music, but we do believe that the problem of racism has to be addressed head-on for what it is and we cannot merely tiptoe around the issue. We also believe we need to see both ourselves and the practices we are involved in from a wider perspective. What kind of patterns are we repeating and do they amount to more justice and advance equity or do they, despite being isolated 'good deeds', assist in maintaining structures that disadvantage certain groups. As anti-racist scholar and activist Ibram X. Kendi (2019) notes, there is no such thing as a race-neutral policy or process. Every action either produces and sustains inequality between racial groups or advances equity between them. To evaluate our actions we need to envision its long-term effects. Short-term effects and simple solutions only serve to support an activist identity and saviourism with the quick reward of 'feeling good'. As music theory scholar Philip A. Ewell (2020: n.pag.) suggests, drawing on journalist and author Ta-Nehisi Coates (2015), rushing towards simple solutions, or 'solutionism' is part of the problem in that it frames racism as a disease with a cure rather than as a complex structure that has to be dismantled. There are no shortcuts in the road towards equity – it takes longterm commitment and it demands us to think much more broadly.