

Plainly Audible

Listening Intersectionally to the Amplified Noise Act in Washington, DC

ABSTRACT This article tells the story of the Amplified Noise Act of 2018, a bill introduced through Washington, DC's council to discourage street musicians in DC's Chinatown neighborhood from disturbing local residents and office workers in the area. The punitive measures proposed in the bill included a \$300 fine, up to ten days in jail, and/or the seizing of the offending equipment by the Metropolitan Police Department (MPD). The public hearing, protests, and legislative maneuvering that followed encapsulate the racialized and sonic dimensions of gentrification in Washington, DC. I introduce these events through a theoretical framework that I call "intersectional listening." Drawing on the work of Kimberlé Crenshaw and intellectual genealogies of Black feminist thought, intersectional listening attends to the sonically articulated expressions of identity that are present in processes of gentrification, producing an analysis that attends to the complexities of sound, power, and race in a changing city. Processes of gentrification amplify tensions surrounding sound, music, and noise in both public and private space, and these tensions are deeply racialized because of the ways in which Black people have long been deemed sonically unruly and unmanageable. Ultimately, this article works to decriminalize Black sound and amplify those striving to do the same.

KEYWORDS gentrification, intersectionality, sound studies, Washington, DC, African American music

In June 2018, three of Washington DC's thirteen elected city councilmembers quietly introduced the Amplified Noise Act (ANA) Amendment of 2018. Written to discourage street musicians in DC's Chinatown Gallery Place neighborhood from disturbing local residents and office workers in the area, the bill was an update to noise ordinances already in effect in DC with a few added provisions. The punitive measures proposed in the bill included a \$300 fine, up to ten days in jail, and/or the seizing of the offending equipment by the Metropolitan Police Department (MPD). For a month, the bill remained relatively uncontroversial, until news of the amendment and a hearing to discuss the changes spread on social media, primarily through Twitter and Facebook. The public hearing, rally, and legislative maneuvering that followed encapsulated the racialized and sonic dimensions of gentrification in Washington, DC, and are a part of the city's long history of imposing legislative and criminal restrictions onto Black sound.

In this article, I tell stories of the Amplified Noise Act through council hearing transcripts, interviews, and my own participant observation. I introduce these events through a theoretical framework that I call "intersectional listening." Drawing on the

work of Kimberlé Crenshaw and intellectual genealogies of Black feminist thought, intersectional listening engages and seeks to disrupt the interlocking matrices of power that are sonically articulated during processes of gentrification, producing an analysis that attends to the complexities of sound and power in a changing city. The events surrounding the Amplified Noise Act provide a rich set of circumstances to unpack the sonic dimensions of gentrification, those facets of neighborhood change that directly or indirectly involve a focus on music, sound, and/or noise. I argue that processes of gentrification include an amplification of tensions surrounding sound, music, and noise in both public and private space, and that these tensions are deeply racialized because of the ways in which Black people have long been deemed sonically unruly and unmanageable. Whether considered too loud, stubbornly silent, dangerously aggressive, overly sexual, or resistant to categorization altogether, Black sonic creation has been consistently stigmatized and subsequently punished.¹

Although DC and cities across the United States (and the world) have experienced rapid gentrification for decades, our current political moment makes listening to neighborhood change in DC even more urgent. The election and subsequent actions of Trump's administration have turned the world's eyes and ears to federal Washington, while residential DC is experiencing a flood of businesses, developers, and rapid demographic shifts that have transformed the character of the city and violently muted the working class. As people, musicians, and soundscapes are displaced, it is imperative to listen to the city and its residents to understand more fully what it means to be silenced, particularly in the middle of a political moment in which protesting and making oneself heard have become more normalized in the public sphere.² I draw here on Black studies, ethnomusicology, sound studies, geography, and the sounds of the city itself to better understand how the council's legislation threatened to alter the aural composition of the city and its most vulnerable residents.

GENTRIFICATION AND SOUND IN BLACK DC

Gentrification has long been theorized through a myriad of lenses: consumption vs production arguments, racial banishment, measuring and predicting with big data, from a planetary perspective, and the list continues.³ The term itself has grown larger than its

1. Examples of the punishment of Black music include the censorship of gangsta rap and the criminalization of go-go music in Washington, DC.

2. Cities across the United States and the world are experiencing a swell of protest against various governmental entities: Black Lives Matter, which began in 2014, paved the way for the post-2016 election protests, including the massively attended 2017 Women's March. In 2019, various countries across Latin America have engaged in intense protest. Hong Kong has also seen large-scale protests for much of 2019. The result of these demonstrations is a normalization of protest culture in popular culture. For example, protest signs regularly become memes on social media. Furthermore, at the time of this writing, the United States is in the midst of a national uprising against police brutality and anti-Black racism, spurred by the deaths of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, and Tony McDade. Protests across the country have led to a nationwide conversation about defunding and abolishing police departments.

3. The production vs consumption arguments appear in the work of David Ley (1996) and Neil Smith (1996). Ananya Roy utilizes "racial banishment" to focus in on the role of the state and the centrality of race that traditional understandings of gentrification and displacement do not emphasize (2019). Michelle Boyd's work on "defensive

housing and neighborhood origins, and has become in some ways synonymous with a process of white people taking over various facets of cultural spaces associated with people of color. For example, white people have “gentrified” the Black Lives Matter Movement, natural hair care, and sneaker culture.⁴ Refraining from this reframing of gentrification as appropriation, I understand gentrification to be the transformation of residential and commercial spaces that is deeply rooted in racialized and classed ideas of desirability, development, and progress. In Washington, DC, this violently transformative process has led to a significant decrease in the city’s Black population, so much so that Derek Hyra argues that the city formerly known as Chocolate City is now more like a “Cappuccino City,” more expensive than Black coffee, with milk in the center that lightens the entire drink.⁵ Gentrification has been occurring in DC for decades, documented ethnographically by scholars such as Brett Williams, Sabiyha Prince, Brandi Thompson Summers, and Natalie Hopkinson, who has done groundbreaking work on the go-go music scene and gentrification. These transformations are always sonic, as they reshape the preferred sonic practices of a space, and maintain desired soundscapes through various tools of discipline, criminalization, and citizenship.

DC’s gentrification process was facilitated by a number of events that continue to reverberate into the 2020s. Large development projects in previously underserved neighborhoods facilitated rising rents and spurred a number of high-rise apartment and condominium buildings. The expansion of the DC Metro system, particularly the Green Line, has expedited neighborhood shifts from Columbia Heights to the Navy Yard. The demolition of public housing projects such as Barry Farms and Temple Courts is also a part of the process, in displacing poor Black residents but also confirming the largely held suspicion that the city’s administration is more concerned with building up areas for wealthy newcomers than supporting working class Black families in public housing. DC’s mayors have also advertised the city as open for development, particularly the Anthony Williams (1999–2007) and Adrien Fenty (2007–2011) administrations. These pro-business sentiments were combined with a significant increase in high-wage jobs that facilitated both an increase in the median income as well as an increase in the amenities for white millennials who were moving into the city in the 1990s and 2000s.⁶

These developments are couched in the rich sonic history of Washington, DC, which includes a groundbreaking punk scene, hip-hop communities, a military band presence, a strong jazz scene, a well-known bluegrass culture, and of course the creation and maintenance of go-go music, the city’s homegrown subgenre of funk. Pioneered in the

development” works through Black gentrification, where members of the Black middle class act as the gentrifying parties (2005). Loretta Lees et al. explore “planetary gentrification” as a way of understanding these processes and consequences on a global scale (2016).

4. Logan, Erin. “White People Have Gentrified Black Lives Matter. It’s a Problem.” *LA Times*, 4 September 2020. Figure out how to reference the following articles: <https://www.latimes.com/opinion/story/2020-09-04/black-lives-matter-white-people-portland-protests-nfl> <https://www.complex.com/sneakers/2018/04/the-gentrification-of-sneakers-is-killing-the-culture> <http://www.curlynikki.com/2017/04/she-moisture-really-tried-to-gentrify.html>

5. Derek Hyra, *Race, Class, and Politics in the Cappuccino City* (University of Chicago Press, 2017).

6. *Ibid.*, 64

early 1970s by bands such as Chuck Brown and the Soul Searchers, Ayre Rayde, and Trouble Funk, go-go music is an energetic live music genre predicated on keeping people going on the dance floor. The presence of go-go and its relationship with the city's governmental processes foreground much of the discussion of the Amplified Noise Act because much of the criminalization of Black musicians in the city has been spurred by the city's attitude toward go-go music. The go-go community has been utilized to spur the city's economy and gain political favor with the Black working class, and yet is consistently disparaged for violence within those same communities.

The police have been used to track and suppress go-go music performances over the years, perhaps most famously with the Metropolitan Police Department's "Go-Go Report," a document circulated in the Washington City Paper in 2010 that detailed the weekly go-go parties throughout the city as well as Prince George's County in Maryland.⁷ Prince George's County, closely related to the go-go scene, has also had its own troubles with the overpolicing of Black people and Black gathering spaces, from the dancehall law that go-go musicians protested in 2011 to the infamous murder of Prince Jones in 2000. With this history of controlling and suppressing Black gathering spaces and musical efforts, it is no surprise that city lawmakers attempted to further criminalize street musicians, most of whom are of color.

The persecution of go-go music gave rise to the #DontMuteDC movement in 2019, and was foregrounded by the organizing around the Amplified Noise Act. #DontMuteDC began in April 2019, when complaints to T-Mobile's corporate office shut down the go-go music being played at "Central Communications," a Black-owned cellphone store in the gentrifying Shaw neighborhood of Washington, DC. The temporary shutdown of go-go at Central Communications, as well as the protests and rallies that followed, fundamentally changed the city's conversation about the role gentrification plays in Black cultural erasure.⁸ #DontMuteDC has remained active well into 2021, resulting in Mayor Muriel Bowser and the DC Council naming go-go as the official music of Washington, DC, a gesture that was widely celebrated but criticized by some as empty, lacking funding and protections for DC's local genre.

Beginning long before go-go, the criminalization of Black music has run rampant throughout the United States for centuries, with laws like the Black Codes. In Washington, DC, these laws were passed in 1848 to determine what was to be legal in the lives of Black people both free and enslaved and was just one iteration of codes passed throughout the United States to guarantee white control over Black life. The laws were extensive, ranging from the cruel ("When runaway slaves can be lawfully killed by their pursuers") to the absurd ("Punishment of slaves for flying kites"). Within these codes, several are of particular interest to the concept of Black gathering spaces and sound. For example, "The Prohibition of Assemblages of Colored Persons," decreed that all assemblages of Black

7. Natalie Hopkinson, *Go-Go Live: The Musical Life and Death of A Chocolate City* (Duke University Press, 2012), 4.

8. Brandi Thompson Summers, "Reclaiming the Chocolate City: Soundscapes of Gentrification and Resistance in Washington, DC," *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* (December 2020).

people, except for religious meetings supervised by white men, were unlawful.⁹ Another code operates similarly, outlawing private, secret, and religious meetings past 10 p.m. The second law went further in that it also implicated the police, declaring that if a policeman did not shut these meetings down after gaining knowledge of them, he was liable to be fined. The Black Codes demonstrate how the police operate as a tool of the state, used specifically to track and suppress Black gathering spaces.

INTERSECTIONAL LISTENING

Gentrification traffics in these histories of silencing and suppression, and an effort to listen to how gentrification resonates and reverberates through the city requires an approach to the sonic that operates with the goal of exploring and uplifting the constellations of Black sound and Black being. In this way, I approach listening as a speculative method, a place in which to reject the strict categorizations that legitimized knowledge production often requires.¹⁰ Thinking with Deborah Kapchan's work on "sound writing," I work towards an embrace of the speculative ephemerality of sound, attempting not to draw hard and fast conclusions but rather to linger in the exchanges between sound and gentrification. Listening to gentrification then operates as a powerful, active mode of hearing people, places, institutions, and power. Further, taking an intersectional approach to listening fosters a way to analyze the lives and experiences of Black people and to audibly gauge pasts, presents, and the speculative sonic future on multiple axes, such as race, class, and gender. Intersectional listening enables us to interrogate music, sound, and noise, as well as what lies in between these distinctions in their relation to broad understandings of space and place.

The acts of listening and sonic work are often considered subordinate to visualization because of deeply embedded cultural expectations of sound.¹¹ Despite this subordination, I utilize sound as a primary means of exploring Black experiences of gentrification because Afro-diasporic ways of knowing often prioritize the sonic, which is both a mechanism of cultural retentions as well as a response to histories of enslavement and oppression. Inaccessibility to formal, Western education has led people of African descent to have a different relationship to text and textuality than some others residing in the Western world. Rather, the sonic is the "principal modality in which Afro-diasporic cultures have been articulated."¹² Likewise, Stuart Hall reminds us that "displaced from a logocentric world—where the direct mastery of cultural modes meant the mastery of writing . . . the people of the diaspora have, in opposition to all that, found the deep form, the deep structure of their cultural life in music."¹³ Black people, then, know genuinely and

9. Worthington G. Snethen, *The Black Code of the District of Columbia* (New York: Published for the A&F Anti-Slavery Society, 1848).

10. Deborah Kapchan, *Theorizing Sound Writing* (Wesleyan University Press, 2017), 12–14.

11. Ana María Ochoa Gautier, *Auralities: Listening and Knowledge in Nineteenth-Century Colombia* (Duke University Press, 2015), 14.; Jonathan Sterne, *The Sound Studies Reader* (Routledge, 2012), 12.

12. Alexander G. Weheliye, *Phonographies: Grooves in Sonic Afro-Modernity* (Duke University Press 2005), 5.

13. Stuart Hall, "What Is This 'Black' in Black Popular Culture?" *Social Justice* 20, no. 1/2 (1993): 51–52, 104–14.

intensely through musical and sonic media.¹⁴ In studying everyday experiences of Black life in a gentrifying Washington, DC, the sonic becomes an especially crucial point of entry. In order to engage the fullness of Black sonic experiences of gentrification in DC, I theorize the sonic through intersectionality.

In her foundational 1991 article “Mapping the Margins,” Kimberlé Crenshaw articulates a framework of intersectional analysis, used to evaluate the intersecting legal oppressions that Black women face, especially in cases of domestic violence.¹⁵ Crenshaw argues that considerations of race are often absent from feminist politics, and attention to the women’s issues are too often missing from anti-racist work. These absences lead to an erasure of the specific everyday violences that Black women and other women of color endure. Although the framework was built for and by Black women, Crenshaw acknowledged the potential of intersectional thought from the beginning, where “intersectionality might be more broadly useful as a way of mediating the tension between assertions of multiple identity and the ongoing group politics.”¹⁶ Thus, intersectionality is (and always has been) more than the race/class/gender framework to which it has been assigned in both popular culture and academic spaces. More than a simple stacking of identities, intersectionality operates as an “analytical strategy”¹⁷ used to rethink social problems and constructions of power.¹⁸ Theorizing listening through an intersectional framework compels me to wrestle with the knowledge that the theorization required to be legitimized within many academic discourses is often at odds with both the social justice orientations of Black studies and the ethnographic fieldwork that remains the hallmark

14. Emphasizing the connections between Blackness and sound runs the risk of essentializing racial categories into particular sensorial categories, and falling into familiar tropes of Black music being improvised and rhythmic, while Western art music is melodic and notated. Drawing from Paul Gilroy’s “anti-anti-essentialism” thesis, however, I maintain that although there are indeed meaningful connections between the aural and the diaspora, this does not limit Black creative output to sonic phenomena (1993). Rather, this connection with sound has been emphasized throughout literature, film, and visual art.

15. The terminology of intersectionality is often attributed to Crenshaw alone, but the analysis of connected aspects of oppression and identity was occurring long before Crenshaw’s work. For example, Anna Julia Cooper’s work in the late nineteenth century, as well as the Combahee River Collective’s work in the 1970s both disrupted the hierarchy of Black freedom movements that presumed to place Black men above Black women.

16. Kimberlé Crenshaw, “Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence against Women of Color,” *Stanford Law Review* 43, no. 6 (1991): 1241–99.

17. Patricia Hill Collins, “Intersectionality’s Definitional Dilemmas,” *Annual Review of Sociology* 41, no. 1 (2015): 1–20.

18. In addition to domestic violence, Crenshaw has also theorized through musical performance, addressing the controversy of 2 Live Crew’s infamous obscenity charge. In 1992, the rap group was charged with obscenity in Broward County, Florida, because of the explicit and often violent sexual content in their lyrics and images. The prosecution in the case presented performance footage as well as transcribed lyrics, citing their vulgarity and graphic nature as evidence of obscenity. 2 Live Crew’s defense, though, focused on hip-hop as context, citing their words as humor and parody within the larger diasporic tradition. The case led to a debate in the Black scholarly community, with prominent scholars such as Henry Louis Gates, Jr. criticizing the obscenity charge as racist, citing 2 Live Crew’s lyrics as part of important African folkloric traditions, which operate as a mode of resistance against white supremacy. While acknowledging the racism of the obscenity charge and the potential resistance value of 2 Live Crew, Crenshaw also brings into focus the rampant misogyny of their lyrics and images, refusing to consider this violence as an afterthought. Therein lies the endeavor of intersectional analysis: a response to the violences committed against Black women must not be either/or, but rather both/and.

of ethnomusicological inquiry.¹⁹ I draw from a number of influences here, as intersectionality and intersectionality studies have been theorized and critiqued within every facet of the academy.²⁰ In music studies, this analytic has been carried forth by scholars such as Eileen Hayes, Alisha Jones, Deborah Wong, and Jocylene Guilbault.²¹ This work is also informed by the rich legacies of Black women's organizing and political knowledges in Washington, DC, from Anna Julia Cooper to Ella Baker.

Within the vast literature on intersectionality and intersectionality studies, Vivian May offers four prescient strategies with which to operate intersectionally, which I paraphrase here: to take up intersectionality's insubordination orientation; to set aside norm emulation as a research or political strategy; to follow opacities/read against the grain, and to embrace a matrix approach to analysis.²² It is with these four strategies in mind that I offer intersectional listening, an intentionally speculative mode of listening that approaches the sonic from a matrix perspective, with the goal of amplifying a multitude of Black lives.²³ Intersectional listening seeks to hear those opacities, those situations or scenarios that are cloudy or not easily understood with current dominant means of knowledge production. This work pushes us to hear the unknowns, things that slip through, and that complicate an otherwise easy analysis. Intersectional listening is not additive; while I indeed seek to approach the sonic from multiple axes, including race, class, gender, and sexuality, this is but the beginning of the work. The heart of intersectional listening is an engagement with the possibilities of Black sound: what it is, has been, and can be.

19. Here I draw from Barbara Christian's critique of what she calls "a race for theory," where the act of theorizing becomes more important than reading, teaching, writing, or in my case, listening to Black people's lived experiences. This race for theory is especially detrimental to those marginalized within the academy, particularly feminist women of color, because "people of color have always theorized—but in forms quite different from Western forms of abstract logic . . . since dynamic rather than fixed ideas seem more to our liking. How else have we managed to survive . . ." The methods of theorization described here, in which people of color must theorize dynamically in order to survive, resonate with this project in two ways. First, the people interviewed for this project, most of whom are African American, offered complex views of their neighborhoods and soundscapes, built through their life experiences and ways of knowing, and my work endeavors to respect my interlocutors as theorists, dynamic and varied as they were. Second, I have had to learn to theorize in a multitude of ways to survive in the academy, needing to craft ways of researching, thinking, and listening that are sustainable for myself and the communities with which I work. This framework, then, is intended to operate as a mode of existence within ethnomusicology, within sound studies, within these disciplines that have long studied me but not yet fully figured out how to study with me.

20. Devon W. Carbado, "Colorblind Intersectionality," in *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 38, no. 4 (1 June 2013): 811–45.; Jennifer C. Nash, *Black Feminism Reimagined: After Intersectionality* (Duke University Press, 2018).; Patricia H. Collins, *Intersectionality as Critical Social Theory* (Duke University Press, 2019).

21. Eileen Hayes's *Songs in Black and Lavender* (2010) explores queer Black women's music festivals, weaving through questions of race, gender, and sexuality. Deborah Wong's 2006 article "Ethnomusicology and Difference" addressed gendered and racial disparities within ethnomusicology in the academy. Alisha Jones's work on Black women's musical and sonic practices has pushed ethnomusicology further into a substantive conversation about intersectionality (2019). Jocylene Guilbault's "audible entanglements" also engages in this work, as she thinks through the production of power through musical performance.

22. Vivian M. May, *Pursuing Intersectionality, Unsettling Dominant Imaginaries* (Routledge, 2015), 229

23. In describing the "matrix approach," May calls for scholars to both "recognize enmeshment" and "refrain from atomizing multiplicity." That is, intersectionality does support treating identities as additive or stackable but rather realms of power and domination as matrices that are entangled within our ways of knowing and relating to one another.

This engagement with Black sound and possibility is what makes intersectional listening a compelling method for listening to gentrification. Gentrification is a process that routinely dismisses and silences Black possibility through a host of interrelated state sanctioned tactics, from legislative maneuvering to the demolition of public housing. Listening intersectionally to gentrification is a commitment to interrogating those facets of spatial and sonic transformation that are typically overlooked and underrepresented, providing a more useful, prescient critique of the process itself. In Washington, DC, this means listening to white women lawmakers battle to be heard amongst the interruption of Black men, even as they attempt to pass racist laws; it means listening to and centering histories of Black women's activism in DC even as Black men are constructed as the primary victims of racist lawmaking; it also means listening to young Black men construct their musical identities as both noisy and non-violent, which disrupts more mainstream activist messaging toward Blackness as not "noise." All of these instances demand a multidimensional aurality, one that is centered on hearing Blackness as expansive rather than reductive.

Where Sumi Cho et al. argue that "single-axis thinking undermines legal thinking, disciplinary knowledge production, and struggles for social justice," I contend that single-axis listening undermines ethnomusicological thinking.²⁴ We are unable to understand how people build their worlds through music and sound if we are unable to listen to their multitudes, to the ways in which they impose and are imposed on in different forms. More than imposition, though, listening intersectionally is about hearing the ways in which people relate to one another and to themselves. Listening intersectionally calls for the analysis of multiple systems of oppression, for a type of hearing that is not centered on maleness or heteronormativity or whiteness. In the case of Washington, DC, I employ intersectional listening to conduct a nuanced analysis of the sonic aspects of gentrification, allowing for the exploration of multiple sound sources, ranging from urban soundscape recordings to spirited debates at civic association meetings, and to musicians at live shows, including how these sources overlap. There are multitudinous ways to understand gentrification, and not all of them coincide with the dominant narrative of Black people being displaced out and white people moving in. By insisting on opaque and difficult knowledges, intersectional listening as an analytic sits with Black people who blame gentrification on Black people, the Black people who testified on the council in favor of the Amplified Noise Act, and even the Black councilmember who sponsored the bill. This analytic offers the space to hear gentrification as anti-Black but also to hear the Black people who support these transformations. Intersectional listening is necessary to interpret the complex aurality of urban space, and to convey the urgency with which neighborhoods are changing.

24. Sumi Cho, Kimberlé Williams Crenshaw, and Leslie McCall. "Toward a Field of Intersectionality Studies: Theory, Applications, and Praxis," in *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 38, no. 4 (1 June 2013): 785–810.

THE HEARING

Washington, DC's status as a federal city rather than a state makes local politics equally fascinating and frustrating. License plates in the city bear the slogan "Taxation without Representation" to protest DC residents' lack of representation in the Senate despite the city's being taxed by the federal government. The city is governed by a mayor and 13-member council, while the shadow of congressional approval looms overhead. This combination of mayor and council is relatively recent, implemented after the Home Rule Act of 1974. Prior to home rule, the city was governed by a board of commissioners that was appointed by Congress. Under the current system, when enacting new legislation, the council often holds public hearings, where residents and community members may testify in person or in writing, offering their opinions on proposed legislation and its impact. In the case of the Amplified Noise Act (ANA), the council held a public hearing on a Monday afternoon in July 2018 at 2 p.m., a time criticized by some to be intentional because many working members of the public could not come to testify. The hearing was for two bills, the first proposing a ban of gas-powered leaf blowers (because of the noise) and the second for the ANA. With more than 50 people scheduled to testify, the hearing lasted over seven hours.

The majority of the people providing testimony were residents, business owners, and office workers in DC's Chinatown-Gallery Place neighborhood, one of the busiest business districts in the city, bustling with downtown workers, tourists, and young adults. Today, Chinatown is home to approximately 300 Chinese American residents, down from 3,000 due to factors such as gentrification and large commercial investments in the neighborhood in the 1990s.²⁵ Originally, DC's Chinese community was clustered around Pennsylvania Avenue downtown, but residents were displaced and moved in the 1930s to make room for the National Gallery of Art, which remains there today.²⁶ The Chinese population relocated to what is now known as Chinatown or Gallery Place, as it is home to the National Portrait Gallery. Many of the remaining Chinese residents in the neighborhood are fighting to stay in the neighborhood, despite being driven out by rising rents, new condos, and the commercial attraction of the Capital One Center, built in 1997 (formerly known as both the Verizon Center and MCI Center).

The racial demographics of Chinatown have shifted drastically since the neighborhood began to gentrify. In 1990, Chinatown's population was approximately 66% Asian and 20% African American. In the 2010 census, those numbers shifted to 21% Asian and 9% Black. Beyond residency, though, Chinatown, or "Gallery" as it's referred to colloquially, has long been a popular hangout area for Black teenagers, who bounce between McDonalds, Chipotle, and the Gallery Place mall. In the early 2010s, Gallery was home to "Check It," a crew of Black LGBTQ youth that were known for their exploits in the area. These histories of working-class Chinese life and later the sounds of Black youth are at

25. Yanan Wang, "D.C.'s Chinatown Has Only 300 Chinese Americans Left, and They're Fighting to Stay," *The Washington Post*, 18 July 2015.

26. Chris Myers Asch and George Derek Musgrove, *Chocolate City: A History of Race and Democracy in the Nation's Capital* (University of North Carolina Press, 2017), 426.

odds with the multimillion dollar investments that continue to pour into the neighborhood, particularly condo developments.

On several of the street corners in the neighborhood, musicians make their living playing music for the tourists and passersby. The music is loud enough to be heard in apartment buildings and restaurants throughout the area, much to the ire of the testifying residents and office workers, many of whom spoke of migraines, lack of sleep and disrupted workdays, as well as disgruntled customers, and other issues the musicians allegedly caused. One resident even compared the situation to terrorism, calling the music a form of “music torture,” and noted that such practices are banned by the United Nations.²⁷ This kind of extreme language was common throughout the hearing; another resident, for example stated that he felt compelled to call Child Protective Services after hearing how loud the music was and seeing a child in the care of the musicians. He felt it his duty to alert the authorities that the child was in danger because of the decibel level of the music. The councilmembers present largely seemed to support the plight of those in support of the ANA, with Ward 2 Councilmember Jack Evans stating that the bucket drummers specifically were indeed “awful.” Evans was noticeably absent during most of the hearing due to other meetings but remains a key figure and author of the bill behind the scenes because Chinatown lies in Ward 2, and the disgruntled residents were his constituents at the time.²⁸ Evans has since resigned his council position due to ethics violations, but the ANA remains in play.

While very few of the testifying community members spoke to race specifically, especially the racial identities of the offending musicians, the entire hearing was racially coded. Participants used language and musical vocabularies that have been historically connected to particular racialized groups. For example, one of the key points of debate during the hearing was the designation of amplified or non-amplified. While the bill specifies only amplified music as problematic, several residents complained specifically about brass bands and drum sets, which are not typically amplified instruments. Council Chairman Phil Mendelson, the veteran legislator who oversaw the hearing, pointed out to residents on more than one occasion that if they wanted to ban brass bands and drum sets, they were essentially asking to ban all of the music because amplified plus non-amplified equals all.

The specific and repeated mention of brass bands and drum sets is racially coded language; these instruments are historically a fundamental part of Afro-diasporic musical

27. Indeed, several national and international bodies have spoken out against music and sound as torture, including the Society for American Music and Society for Ethnomusicology. In response to reports that the United States military was using American music as part of torture processes, the Society for American Music adopted the following resolution in 2007: Whereas, We, the Society for American Music, join the chorus of protest and dissent against the use of torture in military interrogations, Whereas, we, as scholars and musicians, who devote our lives to sustaining American music, protest the contamination of our culture by the heinous misappropriation of music as part of psychological torture, Whereas, art has an ethical, in fact spiritual dimension, no matter what style or genre, and its corruption shames us all, Resolved, we, the Society for American Music condemn the use of music as torture in military interrogations and in particular the debasement of American music in such a fashion (Society for American Music 2007).

28. The ANA is not the council’s first foray into criminalizing musicians and closing venues. In the early 2000s, Ward 1 Councilmember Jim Graham led the charge to ban go-go from clubs and close down “Club U,” located in the U Street Corridor. Graham also led the charge towards various noise ordinance and loitering legislation.

practices. From the brass bands of New Orleans to the polyrhythmic percussion of go-go music, percussion and brass instruments are crucial to music making. In traditions found throughout the diaspora, percussion and brass instruments are essential, especially regarding the polyrhythms that are so prevalent in Black music making. This is a part of what Jennifer Stoeber calls “the sonic color line,” which she describes as “the audible contour of race.”²⁹ The sonic color line is an effective mechanism for thinking through race as a sonic medium, continually created and positioned by laws such as the Amplified Noise Act. By characterizing these instruments as outside the purview of lawfulness and simultaneously exceedingly offensive, the testifying residents made it clear that these important instruments were not to be played in Chinatown. This singling out of instruments operates as an example of the criminalization of Black sonic production. These instruments are sonically coded as part of Black life, and then made part of a problem that needs to be solved via police intervention and financial penalty.

For centuries and without avail, Black sound has been policed and silenced with a number of tactics. During the transatlantic slave trade, silencing led to the creation of the invisible church. Enslaved people found ways to worship away from white eyes and ears because dominant understandings of worship were in many cases antithetical to Black worship practices. To combat Black expressive worship practices, catechisms were written specifically for Black people “as a mode of noise abatement.”³⁰ Dominant control over Black sonic practice has extended well into the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. Law enforcement practices are but one aspect of a larger project to silence Black sonic production, which includes not only the police, but politicians, developers, and everyday actors. Jennifer Stoeber argues that “dominant listening practices discipline us to process white male ways of sounding as default, natural, normal, and desirable . . . they deem alternate ways of listening and sounding aberrant and—depending upon the historical context—as excessively sensitive, strikingly deficient, or impossibly both.”³¹ Black sounds are therefore controlled through silencing, policing, surveillance, intimidation, and a reliance on discourses of respectability that reproduce and shape ideas of whiteness as appropriate and quiet.

Having watched and sifted through the entire seven-hour hearing, I highlight two testimonies here, one in favor of the bill and one opposed to it, as they speak directly to the sonic dimensions of gentrification and provide ample opportunity for practicing intersectional listening. Kymone Freeman, an African American activist and director of the local independent radio station *We Act Radio*, was one of only two people to testify against the Amplified Noise Act. He characterized the bill as racially discriminatory, citing both the historical outlawing of drumming throughout the diaspora and the racial dimensions of gentrification. He also offered the solution of soundproofing the buildings in question so that musicians could continue to play. A portion of Freeman’s testimony is below:

29. Jennifer Lynn Stoeber, *The Sonic Color Line: Race and the Cultural Politics of Listening* (New York: New York University Press, 2016), 6.

30. Ashon T. Crawley, *Blackpentecostal Breath: The Aesthetics of Possibility* (Fordham University Press, 2017), 164.

31. Stoeber, *The Sonic Color Line*, 12.

I'm offended by the speed of this emergency legislation, that's not for a retention plan for long term residents or small businesses being displaced out of the city, but for the powerful, and the wealthy, and their comfort. Amplified Noise Amendment Act of 2018 seeks to provide suburban amenities in urban settings by further criminalizing youth and street musicians. With standards that are subjective and not verifiable, with more negative police encounters. The average white family in DC has 81 times the wealth of the average Black family. This speaks to the inherent disparities in the city. The amplification has not increased in the city, it's the number of new residents that have invaded the city and have increased noise complaints. I run We Act Radio storefront studio in Anacostia with a Metro bus stop that often interrupts our recordings. I do not try to shut down Metro.

Freeman's testimony addresses DC's notorious wealth gap head on, citing this difference in wealth as the reason that noise complaints are increasing across the city, especially in Chinatown. DC does indeed have the widest wealth gap in the country: in 2014, white families had an average net worth of \$284,000, and Black families had an average net worth of \$3,500.³² Furthermore, Freeman's comparison of street musicians to the metrobus is shrewd, as it situates musicians as a vital institution in the city, equivalent to and as necessary as public transportation. He repeated the same rhetorical gesture towards the end of his testimony, asking "do fire stations have to mute their sirens in residential areas?" This testimony shifted the nature of the hearing, because prior to this, in the room itself, the bill was being presented as a slam dunk. Scores of people lined up to testify, organized and coordinated by a special interest group in the neighborhood, to present the maximum impact on the council. This was not an instance of a number of concerned neighbors randomly coming together to fight for an issue they all believed in, but rather an organized effort. At the time Freeman testified, several hours into the hearing, social media had begun to latch on to the bill, presenting it simply as an issue of being jailed for noise: for cookouts, music, and everyday life.

Although this testimony inspired applause from the musicians in the audience at the hearing, the council did not receive it as positively. Mary Cheh, a white councilwoman for Ward 3, told Freeman that the dichotomy that he raised between white and wealthy residents and working-class Black musicians was "bull." In addition to her own frustration with Freeman's testimony, which resulted in a tense exchange between the two, Cheh specifically invited other community members to respond to him, a kind of "piling on" gesture that could have made the situation even more combative had the other witnesses chosen to respond forcefully. In sum, Cheh took offense to Freeman's assertion that the testifying residents were not victims of loud noise and music, and rejected his suggestion that the largely white population of residents and business owners could afford to soundproof their buildings.

The exchange between Freeman and Cheh provides a valuable site for an intersectional analysis of sonic and verbal aggression. The tone and accusations within his testimony

32. Minahil Naveed, "Income Inequality in DC Highest in the Country," DC Fiscal Policy Institute Blog, 15 December 2017. <https://www.dcfpi.org/all/income-inequality-dc-highest-country/>

caused Freeman to be heard as aggressive by the council, especially because he interrupted Cheh during their exchange, which I argue is a gendered gesture:

CHEH: Yes, I'm a little bit troubled by the way you're characterizing this because it's not just residences—

FREEMAN: Let me stop you right there, councilwoman, with all due respect. I'm troubled that we're having this speed of this legislation, when we have yet to address some of the other issues in the city, like displacement. I just want to say that, tit for tat, if you upset I'm upset but please continue. Please go ahead.

CHEH: No no no no, excuse me, I have the mic. You had your opportunity, this is my opportunity. I'm a little bit troubled by your testimony in respect to residences . . .

Women are consistently interrupted by men in the workplace, so much so that people have developed methods and games to keep track of these disruptions.³³ Furthermore, since the council members pride themselves on creating a “DC for all,” they often bristle when directly accused of supporting gentrification and displacing Black residents. In conjunction with her irritation at being accused of supporting displacement, the antagonism that Cheh exhibits is emblematic of the sonic antagonism of white womanhood. From the white woman who falsely accused Emmitt Till to the white woman who intentionally manipulated her voice in order to cause the police to harm Christian Cooper in 2020, the vocal exertions of white women often have detrimental consequences for Black people.³⁴ In the case of Freeman and Cheh, I argue that the councilwoman leveraged her power as an elected official to potentially direct vitriol toward Freeman, who, although he interrupted her, had as much right to testify as the rest of the residents who were in favor of the Amplified Noise Act. In the face of a testimony that drew connections between gentrification, displacement, race, and musical histories, Cheh's angry dismissiveness carried deep-seated racial implications, and further crystallized the racist implications of the bill. By considering the racial implications of the bill as something firmly out of her purview, Cheh aligned herself with the testifying residents, whom she considered to be victims of this loud noise. Taking all of this together, the gendered interruption, the tension of the Amplified Noise Act and its potential for criminalizing musicians, and the histories of white women using their voices to direct violence toward Black people, we begin to get a sense of how intersectional listening can lead us toward a kind of necessary complexity. Intersectional listening posits a refusal of single-axis work, of hearing a racially charged interaction as purely that. Including the auralities of gendered interruption and subsequent retaliation gets us closer to an

33. Gendered interruptions have also been studied by researchers at Stanford University and George Washington University (advisory.com). Games include arementalkingtoomuch.com, which features two buttons, labeled “dude” and “not a dude,” calculating the percentage of men's conversation as the buttons are pressed in real time (arementalkingtoomuch.com).

34. In an exchange recorded by Christian Cooper, a Black birder in New York City, Amy Cooper (no relation) becomes increasingly agitated with him because he asked her to leash her dog and began to record her when she would not. She then threatened to call the police and tell them that “an African American man was attacking her.” When she made the call moments later, she modulated her voice up several pitches, in an effort to appear more in distress than she truly was. The video went viral several times over.

understanding and furthermore, disruption, of matrices of power. Intersectional listening challenges us to both hear and mark the interruption of white womanhood while continuing to work against anti-Black violence.

The second testimony I draw attention to came from a white condominium owner in the Chinatown neighborhood, who was there to speak in support of the Amplified Noise Act. His testimony was one of several of the testimonies at the hearing that referenced Chicago as a city with noise ordinances that should be emulated by DC:

When I visited Chicago about a month ago, I visited Michigan Avenue and talked with five busker groups that were strewn out along this very prestigious area. They had licenses. In the city of Chicago, you have to have a performance license, it's two years and \$100, and if you violate the noise ordinance, the license is lifted. Number two, I went with my noise meter, and I did not encounter any levels higher than 65 decibels. As opposed to over 80 in front of my condo. The third thing, one of the buskers told me that if the law is violated, after several warnings, the police will confiscate the instruments, confiscate the instruments. So, I saw that the buskers in Chicago, very different than the ones here, they're actually afraid of enforcement. They're afraid. They keep within boundaries, and they know what those boundaries are. So, I would be very happy to submit the Chicago Noise Ordinance.³⁵

This testimony is compelling for a number of reasons. Although this area in Chicago is popular for tourists (as is Chinatown in DC), the coding of Michigan Avenue as “prestigious” is thinly veiled to describe the area as affluent, and therefore closer to an ideal of whiteness.³⁶ Furthermore, it was this testimony that then introduced a conversation into the hearing about the potential for confiscating and impounding musical instruments by the Metropolitan Police Department.

The most striking component of this testimony is his proposal of the adoption of Chicago's Noise Ordinance because there, musicians are afraid. He cited fear of enforcement and a fear of the police as a reason to adopt a law from another city. The testifying resident considered street musicians as people [or entities] to be kept in line within boundaries, which is largely what the other supporters of the ANA were asking for, although it was not put so bluntly by all of them. The residents at this hearing, who were primarily white, were asking the council to authorize the police to engage and enforce the noise regulations. As seen from the widescale protests in the summer of 2020 and smaller protests years prior, the relationship between Black residents and police officers in DC is often contentious. In fact, in the same month that the battle over the ANA was raging, councilmembers and residents were seeking accountability for the activity of the Gun Recovery Unit of the MPD, which utilizes a tactic known as

35. I have refrained from using this witness's name because although this was a public hearing, I did not speak to or interview this particular witness.

36. Wealth is often equated to whiteness, as exemplified in one of Joe Biden's 2019 presidential campaign speeches. He said that “poor kids are just as bright as white kids,” a gaffe that connects racialization to wealth so tightly that children of color are inconceivable as not being poor. Matt Stevens, “Joe Biden Says ‘Poor Kids’ are Just as Bright as ‘White Kids,’” *The New York Times*, 9 August 2019, <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/08/09/us/politics/joe-biden-poor-kids.html>

“jumpouts.”³⁷ Videos of officers searching Black men outside of a barbershop drew outrage on social media because it seemed that the officers had planted someone with a BB gun in order to facilitate the other searches. In the midst of these tensions, many community members were wary of the possibility of greater escalation. My point here is that the testifying resident wanted to reproduce the kind of fear that he saw and heard from musicians in Chicago, just in front of his own condo. He wanted musicians to be quieter because they were afraid of the police. But what we know about people and police and fear is that the fear comes from knowing that the police may harass and murder you with impunity.

In addition to listening to individual interactions (such as those between Kymone Freeman and Councilwoman Mary Cheh), part of what intersectional listening offers as an analytical framework is aural attention to interconnected systems of oppression, and what these systems sound like in the everyday life of a gentrifying city. The systems of oppression relevant here, largely policing, have been sounding across time and space for centuries. The resident testifying in support of the ANA heard fear of the police in Chicago, and was encouraged that the fear he heard in Chicago would solve his problem in DC. His testimony asked the council to consider the noise ordinance that produced said Chicagoan fear, so that it might be reproduced in a DC context. Listening intersectionally here produces a sonic spatiality that accounts for and is situated within an aural spacetime of policing Black people and fear. Listening speculatively across these histories helps us to understand how deeply the fabric of white supremacy is woven across the US.

Historian Khalil Muhammad, in a biography of Black criminality in the United States, argues that understanding Blackness as criminal has contributed to understandings of what Blackness *is*.³⁸ Similar gestures have been made in reference to Black sound, because understanding Black sound as too loud, too noisy, and out of place, stabilizes an understanding of what Blackness sounds like. Herein lies one of the ironies of the hearing. Several residents testified that they did not want the music to stop, and that they thought the music brought vibrancy to the neighborhood. At the same time, however, they were asking specifically for the police to be allowed to enforce the noise ordinances, through fines, jail time, and the seizing of equipment. This contradiction is an opportunity for listening intersectionally to the hegemony of policing. People claim that they love the music and want no harm to come to the musicians and then still ask for policing. There is a dissonance here, between the willful ignorance about the level of danger that the police pose to people of color as well as a driving need to utilize the tools made available to citizens for their safety and comfort, namely the police. Public opinion is also a factor here, where social media very quickly sided with the musicians, and those testifying in favor of the ANA depicted themselves as “pro-music” so as to resist the label of “gentrifier” that was being thrust upon them.

37. Max Kutner, “Jump-Outs: D.C.’s Scarier Version of Stop and Frisk” *Newsweek*, 16 January 2015. <https://www.newsweek.com/jump-outs-dcs-scarier-version-stop-and-frisk-300151>

38. Khalil Gibran Muhammad, *The Condemnation of Blackness: Race, Crime, and the Making of Modern Urban America* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2010).

THE RALLY

In response to the events of the hearing and the upcoming council vote, local independent radio station We Act Radio held an emergency press conference and rally at the corner of 7th Street and H Street NW, in the heart of DC's Chinatown Gallery Place neighborhood. The rally featured a combination of performances, speeches, chants, and DJ sets, all presented to raise awareness about the ANA and the implications of the legislation on the city's musical community. The event was a who's who of the DC's music community, including representatives from groups such as a One Love Massive, Listen Local First, and a representative from the local chapter of the Grammys.³⁹ Although the rally was peaceful, the Metropolitan Police Department displayed a highly visible police presence throughout the duration of the event, and organizers repeatedly asked for demonstrators to keep the sidewalk clear on 7th Street, so that the police would not have a reason to disrupt the event. The combination of police, demonstrators, musicians, teenagers, tourists, the homeless population, and media crews all congregated on one street corner produced a level of energy that was tense, hopeful, angry, and familial all at once.

The rally was hosted by Dior Ashley Brown, an emcee and activist originally from DC who spent her childhood in a military family moving around the United States before eventually returning home for high school and college. Brown has a history of combining art and activism in the city, from her work on the Big Ugly truck to the founding of "Reformance Art," which is a collective meant to perform and reform.⁴⁰ Reformance Art was founded in 2016 as a response to the election of 45. During the rally, Brown acted as both emcee and performer, keeping the energy of the crowd up and facilitating between performers and announcements alike. As emcee, Brown was responsible for delivering quick, cogent soundbites about the rally to passersby as well as those participating in the event. She also engaged in a meticulous citational practice, shouting out the musicians and DJ who participated throughout the event as well as speakers and sponsors. Brown also served as public safety liaison, cautioning everyone to keep the sidewalks clear, so as to let people get home from work but also so as not to provoke the Metropolitan Police Department. She also implored people to email their councilmembers immediately, to ask them not to vote for the bill. There was a sense of urgency about the entire event, especially because the bill was put to a vote so quickly, as "emergency legislation."

During our interview about the Amplified Noise Act, Brown attributed the success of organizing not only to the publicity that the rally drew, but also to the work behind the scenes:

39. One Love Massive is a media and creative collective founded in 2001 focused on the cultural underground of the DMV. Their headquarters are in Shaw, Washington, DC, next to the historic Howard Theater. Listen Local First is a collective that advocates for local musicians in DC, in regard to funding, legislative support, and the like. They took a large role in organizing against the ANA.

40. Big Ugly Truck is a performance venture that offers live mobile dance parties staged from a large truck with speakers and accompanying performers. Dior Ashley Brown performed as a part of Big Ugly Truck regularly at the corner of 14 and U Streets, an iconic space in DC both for its proximities to go-go music and Black Broadway, but also because of its history as the beginning site of the 1968 rebellions following the assassination of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.

So, Listen Local First hit up everybody, like send this to your councilmen. And I had just been learning about it, and having conversations about it with this team that I work with called Big Ugly Truck. And we play outside at 14th and U.⁴¹ Kymone (Freeman) comes out and supports us, all that. So, we were talking about how we saw Kymone there representing, saw Malik on there and some other people, I think Kenny Sway was on there too. And with Listen Local First, they sent out an email, a blanket draft email on what you should copy and paste, add your wording, and send it to the councilmembers. So, I did that, and once I did that, I went on my Facebook, and posted it and tagged everybody on it. And I just did that because I'm like I want to fight for my community. It was instant. After that, got a gross amount of shares and follows, and my friends were like I got you Dior. And it's so natural for me, you know what I'm saying? So, we came together for the cause, so somehow one of them started the chain message and they were like yo, Dior, Kymone, Chris Naoum, come down to the Wilson Building, [and] we started whipping votes . . . So we spent the entire day before we even got to Chinatown whipping from councilmember to councilmember's office.

Brown's work during the organizing process was crucial, as she used her influence, substantial social media following, and contacts within the city's music and activist scenes to prevent the bill from passing in its original state. Brown is one in a long line of Black women organizers in DC, lending her voice and platform for an issue close to her. Women such as Anna Julia Cooper, Mary Church Terrell, and Etta Horn are all a part of the legacy of Black organizing and intellectualism in the city, and Brown is no exception. In spaces where women's issues are often considered peripheral, Black women consistently take on a lion's share of the organizing labor, which cannot be ignored. The histories of Black women's organizing in Washington, DC, is particularly rich, as described by Treva Lindsey in her work on *New Negro Womanhood* in the city, where she considers how seemingly disparate groups of women were able to connect and build a legacy of intellect and resistance.⁴² In addition to a broader collective of Black women's organizing, Black women have also specifically engaged in political artistic practice in Washington, DC. In this way, gentrification is gendered not only in how it affects different populations, but also in the ways in which organizing against gentrification is gendered. Women are often working for people that are not working for them in return.

In addition to Dior Ashley Brown, the rally comprised other Black musicians and dancers that frequent Chinatown including Vanny, a queer Black woman who performs pop song covers with a guitar and microphone, and Malik the Dope Drummer, a well-known percussionist who has gone on to compete on the national competition *America's Got Talent*. They are regulars on the scene along with a number of bucket drummers, who are a staple outside the Capital One Arena after large events and are closely related to

41. The intersection at 14th and U Streets is iconic in Washington, DC, because it was the starting place of the 1968 riots after the assassination of Martin Luther King, Jr. It also houses the Reeves Center, built in 1986 and invested in by Marion Barry, who was attempting to revitalize the blighted U Street Corridor, which was once known as DC's "Black Broadway." The Reeves Center, in addition to being a standard government building, also used to house a go-go club in the basement called "Club U," which was closed in 2005 because of a homicide.

42. Treva B. Lindsey, *Colored No More: Reinventing Black Womanhood in Washington, D.C.* (University of Illinois Press, 2017).

DC's percussion based go-go music scene. Although there were quite a few performances during the rally, including rapping and MCing from Brown herself, the band that received the most attention during the rally was Kill Mo, a punk/metal band made up of four young Black men, who closed out the event. After a brief soundcheck, the lead singer offered the following explanation of the band's name: "We're Kill Mo. If y'all from the city or y'all not from the city, Kill Mo is just another way of confirming, reaffirming, stamping, or betting. So, it's like 'yeah, yeah, yeah? Kill Mo.' We do alternative, punk, metal, thrash, bounce groove. We just like noise." The embrace of noise here is in direct contrast to some of the organizers' efforts to reject the label of "noise."⁴³ Kill Mo, in line with their punk and metal roots, reclaimed noise during their performance to argue that yes, they are noisy, and yes, they still should be able to perform on the street. Their performance is an example of Black artists and organizers with different aural philosophies working together against legislation that is harmful to Black people.

Kill Mo performed two songs at the rally, "Hourglass Betrayal" and "400 Years." The first was described by the band as a "party song," with heavy guitar licks and verses that alternated between singing and screamed lyrics, most of which were unintelligible over the sounds of the street. The second song, "400 Years," was described by the lead singer as a little heavier than the first: "this second song is about colonialism and slavery, human zoos and strange fruit." The strange fruit reference is to the song made famous by Billie Holiday, which described the chilling sight of lynched Black bodies hanging from poplar trees in the American South. He also began the song by screaming "Kill Mo," the band's namesake. Just like with Hourglass Betrayal, the verses of "400 Years" were screamed, and the guitarist sang the chorus. The bridge of the song, however, had a new element: lyrics spoken in French. The lead singer expressed the following sentiment in French: "It's the same for us, all the Africans and the African Americans. We're the same. What are you gonna do?" This last question was repeated several times before the chorus of the song returned, with some vocal harmony between the lead singer and guitarist. At the end of the song, which ended the set, the lead singer offered some parting words amid screams of "Kill Mo," namely that they were "coming for the chocolate city revival."

Kill Mo's performance was well received by the crowd, with plenty of videographers circling during their songs as well as a couple of people asking when they could see the band perform live. I want to focus here on the identities that the band members asserted during their performance at the rally. The members of Kill Mo first and foremost asserted their regional identity, as young Washingtonians. They did this through the explanation of their name, their DC accents, and the repeated shouting of "Kill Mo" throughout the performance. Beyond this regional identity, though, they asserted their Blackness as well. The inclusion of French in "400 years" situated the band within a diasporic struggle for freedom, connecting the ANA to the struggles of Haiti, known across the diaspora as a symbol of freedom fighting because of the Haitian revolution and the imperialist

43. The embrace and theorization of noise is prevalent in Tricia Rose's *Black Noise* (1994).

consequences that have continued to the present day.⁴⁴ They put themselves in the same space as Haitians and Africans on the continent more broadly, further solidifying the diasporic struggle for freedom.

In addition to regional and diasporic identity, Kill Mo also asserted themselves as punk and metal musicians, which can operate as political act in itself, because it lies outside the more popular and expected Black music genres of hip-hop and R&B.⁴⁵ The identities espoused here by Kill Mo, of a global Blackness, a fierce loyalty to Washington, DC, and to punk and metal traditions and aesthetics, are important to a practice of intersectional listening, because they provide opportunities to listen to the multitudes of young Black men. These Black men, who are often assigned dangerous two-dimensional narratives of criminality, heteronormativity, and danger, offered a fuller understanding of themselves at the rally. They invited attendees to listen against the grain with them, to a type of local and diasporic noisemaking that supported organizers working against the ANA. Intersectional listening, as both analytic and practice, considers the fullness of Black life, even as it is continually stifled by the binaries and constraints of the cisheteropatriarchy.

CONCLUSION

The Amplified Noise Act is a primary example of what gentrification sounds like in Washington, DC: a displacement of local genres of music and musicians (in this case street musicians in Chinatown), as well as increased tensions over sound, noise, and music in “public” space. Residents and workers in Chinatown, tired of the noise levels of the musicians, worked with the council to draft legislation that would allow the police to enforce the noise standards, which they were seemingly unwilling or unable to do previously. These residents leaned on a combination of legislative and criminal justice aspects of city policies in order to take care of what they considered a problem in their neighborhood. The danger of the ANA is that requesting permission for police to escalate encounters with street musicians is actively endangering the lives of people of color. The organizers of the rally were very clear on this, adamant that this legislation had the potential to get someone killed by the police.

Gentrification involves a claiming of supposedly public space by incoming populations, and the use of various authorities to maintain the exclusivity of these spaces. The news is consistently riddled with stories of Black people being put out of public spaces, out of private spaces to which they belong, and everything in between. White people call the police on Black people at Starbucks, at neighborhood pools, for selling lemonade, sleeping in university common rooms, standing out of the rain, mowing lawns, for simply existing in “white” spaces. White spaces require a kind of exclusiveness, a kind of private attitude

44. Haiti’s insurrection in the eighteenth century has led to a long and violent history with the Western world, including a swath of environmental racism that is seen in responses to the 2010 earthquake that devastated the island. For an ethnomusicological perspective on Haitian relationships to the environment, see Rebecca Dirksen’s *ecomusicological work on the subject* (Dirksen 2019).

45. Maureen Mahon. *Right to Rock: The Black Rock Coalition and the Cultural Politics of Race* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2004).

so that Black people can be labeled unwelcome.⁴⁶ Gentrification is one of the worst instances of this practice because whiteness then claims a space that was (or still is) inhabited by Black people. In the case of Chinatown, people have claimed that space as one that needs to be silent at particular times, and they have enlisted the police to aid them in this quest. White spaces, much like whiteness itself, demand an exclusivity related to control and policing.

Composer R. Murray Schafer notes that “the study of noise legislation is interesting, not because anything is ever really accomplished by it, rather because it provides us with a concrete register of acoustic phobias and nuisances.”⁴⁷ In the case of this noise legislation, Black noise is treated as both phobia and nuisance, where the music is unbearable for residents of Chinatown, but street musicians themselves are treated as unapproachable and unwilling to compromise. The fear and dismissal of Black music is happening all over the country, with legislation and arrests happening in cities such as New Orleans, Oakland, and Austin, Texas.⁴⁸ What is important here is to lay bare the histories of policing and legislating Black sound, and to parse the ways in which language and soundscapes are regimented to dismiss particular racialized sound practices.

The events outlined here are only a snapshot in time of a larger process. Although the emergency legislation was withdrawn from the council the day after the rally, another hearing to reintroduce the bill took place in October 2018, and eventually the bill was shelved for revisitation, in part because of the #DontMuteDC movement that began in April 2019. But as long as gentrification continues, conversations about noise, Blackness, and criminality will as well. All throughout the city, cookouts, family gatherings, impromptu protests, and block parties are threatened by a refusal to consider other options to settle differences between residents and business owners besides direct confrontation with the police. My goal in marking the sonorities of the ANA is not to track silences and amplifications neighborhood by gentrifying neighborhood, but rather to utilize intersectional listening to make audible what violences are enacted in the name of a “peaceful” night’s sleep. ■

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