

## Social Justice and Music Education: Claiming the Space of Music Education as a Site of Postcolonial Contestation<sup>1</sup>

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### PREFACE



In recent years, music educators have become interested in linking music education practices, programs and projects to issues of social justice. However, theoretical approaches to conceptualizing the problem or to developing strategic interventions have yet to occur within our field. In this paper, I argue that to address social justice we need theoretical tools oriented to *injustice*, its causes and its manifestations. Addressing injustice means engaging with the political, locating ourselves historically and coming to terms with our implicatedness in injustice. Critical exploration of our positionality and our philosophical assumptions is vital to this enterprise. Without such critiques we risk getting caught up in discourses of charity—discourses that too often result in ‘feel good’ projects that valorize the giver while maintaining the inferior position of the receiver. Discourses of charity do not require us to ask how we have come to be in a position of ‘superiority’ relative to those defined as being ‘in need.’ In contrast, critiques that examine the ways legal, economic and social systems—and *the discourses that support them*—produce and maintain systemic injustice can help move us beyond the limits of charitable models. My argument in this paper is that a number of assumptions attributable to Enlightenment philosophy interfere with our capacity to analyze injustice. Contradictions between stated ideals, political claims and material reality are masked by liberal discourse, undermining our recognition of the ways we are implicated in systems of oppression. I argue that the literatures of critical race theory and feminist post-colonial analysis provide necessary perspectives as well as analytical tools that are essential to addressing injustice.

Part 1 of this essay explores contradictions in modernist frameworks that become evident when certain kinds of claims are considered in light of the history of colonization. Part 2

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explores several foundational concepts used in the philosophical work of Bennett Reimer, David Elliott and Paul Woodford that reflect the contradictions identified in Part 1. My goal is to show how recognition of these contradictions opens up different kinds of questions—questions vital to the task of theorizing social justice within the context of music education. The paper concludes with a call to locate ourselves politically; to look critically at assumptions of neutrality in our musical and social projects; and to engage with the legacies of modernist thinking, particularly as manifested in race, class and gender hierarchies, as we seek to develop socially just orientations in the field of music education.

#### PART 1:

##### MODERNIST DISCOURSES: UNIVERSALITY, OBJECTIVITY, THE AUTONOMOUS INDIVIDUAL AND SALVATIONIST NARRATIVES

We are inheritors of modernism, a product of 17<sup>th</sup> century Enlightenment thinking that is fundamental to the narratives and practices that constitute who we are as Westerners. Philosophical concepts drawn from the Enlightenment, whether endorsed overtly or accepted tacitly, are reflected in our social, economic, legal and political relationships. A philosophical shift from arbitrary authority to authority based on reason (to principles of justice determined by objectively verifiable standards), Enlightenment philosophy continues to have tremendous appeal. Its ideal of objectivity, the elimination of subjectivity and self-interest from our explorations and understandings of the world, seeks to achieve universal truths by purging knowledge of the contingent and the personal. However, “objective science” and its attendant notion of universality grew up at the same time as trans-Atlantic slavery and colonization—forms of violence deemed acceptable and justifiable within the tenets of Enlightenment philosophy.

Another part of our philosophical inheritance is an ahistorical view of ourselves and our relations with Others—as if each of us were solely the product of individual effort, free of legal, political or economic influences. The notion of the autonomous individual grew out of the attempt to establish universal, objective truths that apply to all, regardless of social or historical contingencies. The concepts of the autonomous individual, universality and objectivity enable us

to treat the construction of our selves as if we were beyond historical influence and free from vested interests. However, as the histories of slavery and colonization clearly demonstrate, the conceptual frameworks associated with reason, objectivity and universal value become weapons of oppression when they are conceived as standing above history and personal interest. They hide from view the ways the particulars of experience intersect and interfere with truth claims. As David Theo Goldberg states, “moral modernity fails to recognize the series of exclusions upon which the state of modernity is constituted” (1993, 39).<sup>2</sup> Despite ideals of equality, the concept of the Other has been necessary to distinguish those considered fully human from those deemed less evolved, to differentiate insiders from outsiders.

This ahistorical, exclusive and exclusionary conceptualization of the self serves several political functions. It suggests that individuals are solely responsible for their successes and failures, and it masks historical and contemporary relations between *groups* of people (see Boyd 2002). Ahistorical approaches to social relations are particularly effective at erasing from view the existence of divisions according to race, class and gender. Within this liberal framework, historical contingencies are not supposed to distract us from abstract ideals or truths. As a consequence, group conditions (access to resources, living conditions on ‘reserves’ or in ghettos, systemic violence, etc.) are hidden from view. The idea of individual autonomy permits us to set aside violent histories of colonization and their ongoing manifestations, erasing them from contemporary social and economic relations.

In the dominant narrative of Western democracies, ‘citizens’ are the beneficiaries of enlightened forefathers<sup>3</sup> who founded great nations and brought civilization to the ‘new’ world. ‘We’ are taught, as members of democracies, to exercise ‘our’ rights and responsibilities with a sense of justice based upon the primacy of reason and rationality.<sup>4</sup> This understanding of our relationship to democracy assigns ‘us’ a duty to bring our enlightened, rational ways to other parts of the world that have been limited by what we construe as ‘primitive thinking.’ This narrative is restrictive in several ways that are important to my consideration of social justice issues. Specifically, discourses that place autonomous individuals at the centre of philosophical discussion do not require that ‘we’ (identified as rational agents) question how we have come to understand encounters with Others. Indeed, such discourses constrain our capacity to even

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consider the ways that our philosophical, political and economic orientations are constructed *in relation* to Others. The democratic narratives with which we are most familiar rehearse the idea that we are self-made by virtue of having overcome nature and the odds. These are heroic narratives that produce particular understandings of ourselves: we are citizens, democratic heroes. What we do not typically notice, however, is the way the story line of democracy can rationalize violence by defining it as ‘cleaning up’<sup>5</sup> or ‘civilizing’ problem areas and/or people.<sup>6</sup>

I refer to this locating of ourselves at the rational and enlightened centre, with its concomitant duty to help others, as a salvationist narrative. This is a narrative, familiar to indigenous peoples around the world, in which Christianity, democracy, and/or capitalism are imposed on others because they are believed to be in the best interests of those being colonized. Salvationist narratives draw upon our sense of duty to help; however, they are also deeply implicated in our (state and individual) desire to possess and/or control. Salvationist narratives can be expressed in apparently generous acts when people with privilege reach out to ‘help people less fortunate than themselves’ without exploring or addressing the factors that have created glaring inequalities. Liberalism teaches us that it is the citizen’s duty to ‘lift up’ the ‘underprivileged’ or the ‘underdeveloped’, and yet, this duty and the hierarchical relationships it fosters are predicated upon the notion of *lesser* Others—a notion developed assiduously during the Enlightenment. The notion of *lesser* Others situates us (citizens) squarely in charity narratives that fail to question how contemporary relationships have come to be as they are.

These arguments are drawn from the literatures of critical race theory and feminist post-colonial analysis, literatures that critically explore the histories and justificatory discourses of Western, hierarchically-based political, economic and social structures, and literatures in which race, gender and class figure centrally. Such issues and concerns are generally neglected by philosophical literature in music education that is grounded in modernist, liberal frameworks.<sup>7</sup> Neglecting the contradictions of modernist thought enables the claims that music and music education are apolitical—claims whose validity is challenged seriously by music’s significant role in processes of colonization, where it is used both to erase cultural identities and to enforce new identities through civilizing projects like religious imposition and schooling.

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My underlying assumption is that music is a key site of cultural, and hence, political contestation. Consistent with the work of Richard Leppert (1987, 1989), Jacques Attali (1985), Estelle Jorgensen (2003) and Tia DeNora (1995, 2000, 2002), I understand music as both a reflection of social values and a means of constructing social meaning. The idea that musical meanings and values are social constructions negates claims to intrinsic worth and universal meaning. Rather, value and meaning are ascribed to different musics by people as they engage in discourses circulating at any given moment. Musical meaning can change, then, depending on context. For example, Beethoven's "Ode to Joy" might represent the triumph of the human spirit, sinister depravity, or the pleasures of drinking milk, depending on the occasion.<sup>8</sup> Rap and hip hop represent resistance to dominant expectations within certain youth cultures, while, in other social contexts, rap and hip hop represent the degeneracy of youth of colour. The mutability of musical meanings (including political meanings) notwithstanding, opinions about the value and function of different kinds of music tend to be held tenaciously and defended vehemently. Musical likes and dislikes are strongly associated with identity and while musical identities are saturated with personal significance they are also deeply connected to social and political relations. In other words, although, in my view, it is impossible to assign absolute meanings to music that transcend time and place, the meanings attributed to music within specific contexts are highly significant at the level of the personal, social and political.

These are important ideas for music educators to consider. Our investments in particular discourses about music shape our decisions about what is worthy of study. Nevertheless, the ways different musics establish and solidify group identities—race, class and gender included—are not generally taken into account in our understandings of the ways music functions in people's lives. I believe that certain modernist assumptions—specifically, universality, objectivity, the autonomous individual, and the salvationist narratives—restrict our field of vision in problematic ways. They lead, for example, to the denial of importance of feminist or anti-colonial critiques; they also lead to the valorization of the status quo<sup>9</sup> in ways that occlude possibilities for imagining a world that does not accept violence and inequality as inevitable.

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## Enlightenment Philosophy, Liberalism and Colonization

Rooted in notions of liberty, universality, and the disinterestedness of reason, Enlightenment theory is closely aligned both with the project of modernity and the development of liberalism.

David Goldberg writes:

Liberalism is committed to individualism for it takes as basic the moral, political, and legal claims of the individual over and against those of the collective. It seeks foundations in universal principles applicable to all human beings or rational agents in virtue of their humanity or rationality. In this, liberalism seeks to transcend particular historical, social, and cultural differences: It is concerned with broad identities which it insists unite persons on moral grounds, rather than with those identities which divide political, culturally, geographically, or temporally. The philosophical basis of this broad human identity, of an essentially human nature, is taken to lie in a common rational core within each individual, in the (potential) capacity to be moved by Reason. (Goldberg 1993, 5)

On the surface, liberalism's appeals to universal principles and common human interests suggest that race, gender, class or other distinguishing markers do not have a place in liberal ideology. However, this is not how liberalism has functioned in the past; nor does it function this way in the present. Just as the notion of the autonomous individual obscures political relationships, the Enlightenment preoccupation with order masks contradictions between ideals of equality and the realities of oppression. Hierarchical taxonomies of value, promulgated as the outcome of "disinterested" reason, were developed contemporaneously with, and were deeply implicated in colonization, trans-Atlantic slavery and the scientific systematization of gender and class. People identified with social groups considered closer to nature were, for instance, ranked lower on the human evolutionary scale. Goldberg describes this historical pattern exactly:

[A]t the heart of modernity lies the concern with order. This concern is expressed through the domination of Nature by Reason; through the transparency of Nature to Reason in the Laws of Nature; through the classification of Nature in rational systems of thought; and through the mastery of Nature, physical and human, by way of 'design, manipulation, management, engineering'. (Goldberg 1993, 3)

Taxonomies of value were used (and are still used in slightly altered forms) to rationalize tremendous violence towards those defined as primitive and Other. The association of certain bodies with nature served as a justification for domination (imperialism)—despite the claimed commitment to universal ideals and equality. A popular nineteenth century historical model, the

“Great Chain of Being,” illustrates this well. Using metaphors of progress and gradualism, the Great Chain of Being (also known as the “Great Tree of Life”) placed ‘savages’ at the base of human development where they were associated with the “natural” and the libidinous. White, educated men were the only humans deemed fully capable of reason and were placed at the top of the chain, signifying their status as the evolutionary high point of human development. Emotions were identified as feminine and were positioned much lower on the evolutionary scale; and gendered attributes were differentiated even further in order to distinguish ‘civilized’ from ‘uncivilized’ cultures (Lesko 2001, 19).

“Recapitulation theory,” an adjunct theory to the Great Chain of Being, extended the concept of “natural” order to account for the maturation process of individuals. In this accounting of “natural, scientific” order, stages of *individual* development were expressed according to their proximity to, or distance from, the natural world. Again, white men were the only people considered biologically capable of achieving the pinnacle of mature civility associated with the capacity to rule. The path to this maturity was considered to be fraught with dangers, as men had to traverse successfully the stages of the Great Chain of Being in order to reach the pinnacle. These developmental stages were presumed equivalent to the lower stages on the human evolutionary scale. Thus, boys started at the ‘savage’ stage, moved through stages parallel to cultures of more ‘sophisticated’ but still ‘underdeveloped’ peoples until, eventually they reached the highest level of the scale (associated with European civil society). People other than white males were by definition incapable of achieving full humanity and thus needed to be ruled by the firm hand of someone higher up the scale. Nancy Lesko describes the political function of these theories:

Recapitulation theory appeared to offer an "absolute biological criterion not only for racial but also for sexual and class ranking." The white boy could be compared with Semites, Hottentots or the Irish to offer certain observations about their degree of sophistication, that is, these groups' degree of resemblance to white middle-class men.... Scholars of colonial discourses in Africa, Asia, and the Americas have regularly noted that racialized others have been invariably equated with and compared to children: "a representation that conveniently provided a moral justification for imperial policies of tutelage, discipline and specific paternalistic and maternalistic strategies of custodial control." (2001, 32)

The strong, disciplined white, male Christian citizen embodied characteristics believed to be essential to the development of a democratic culture. Conceptually, this figure was defined by way of contrast to varying accounts of the Other. Accordingly, non-whites, women, children, and those who deviated from the prescribed sexual and gender norms were classified as intrinsically less evolved, not fully human. Others were thereby designated as ill-suited to, or undeserving of, democratic rights and responsibilities.<sup>10</sup>

In addition to justifying race, class and gender relationships *within* western nations, similar hierarchal taxonomies were used quite explicitly by philosophers such as Kant, Hegel, and Heidegger, and by colonial administrators, such as John Locke and Duncan Cameron Scott, to justify *eliminating* whole groups of people (Gilroy 2000, 58-63; 142). As Goldberg states,

The historical record of moral appeals to race by many of the greatest intellectual and political figures in the liberal tradition is overwhelming. A few examples will suffice. Kant, citing with approval David Hume's likening of learning by 'negroes' to that of parrots, insisted upon the natural stupidity of blacks. John Stuart Mill, like his father, presupposed nonwhite nations to be uncivilized and so historically incapable of self-government. Benjamin Disraeli captured the sensibility of the mid-nineteenth century by declaring the only truth to be that 'all is race'. (1993, 5)

Biology is destiny in these frameworks. It naturalizes answers to the questions: who rules and who is ruled, who benefits from "Manifest Destiny"<sup>11</sup> and who is born to be subjugated. These arguments, advanced at the time as instances of disinterested reason, clearly served to privilege particular interests and highly "interested" points of view. Modernist agents bent on 'civilization' paradoxically embraced violence, cruelty and oppression as necessary tools in the march towards European-defined progress. Such acts as the appropriation of land and resources or the enslavement (or extermination) of various peoples required rationales that could explain differential access to the rights so clearly articulated by various Enlightenment philosophers. Taxonomies of human value, linked with an insistence upon the objectivity and rationality of scientific inquiry, served this function well.

Thus, Enlightenment thinking made it rationally and morally acceptable to harness (Cooper 2006, 299)<sup>12</sup> the bodies of Others in the service of civilization (see especially Said 1993, Introduction). It was considered 'noble' to convert Others to Christianity (by persuasion or, if necessary, by force). It was considered rational and moral to remove "primitive"

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inhabitants through battle, germ warfare or confinement to substandard tracts of land, whenever that removal helped colonists (colonizers) to thrive.<sup>13</sup> Mahood Mamdani describes the way that European politics embraced raciology, or biological determinism, as a guiding principle:

The idea that "imperialism had served civilization by clearing inferior races off the earth" found widespread expression in nineteenth-century European thought, from natural sciences and philosophy to anthropology and politics.... By the beginning of the twentieth century, it was a European habit to distinguish between civilized wars and colonial wars. The laws of war applied to wars among the civilized nation-states, but laws of nature were said to apply to colonial wars, and the extermination of the lower races was seen as a biological necessity. (2004, 6-7)<sup>14</sup>

With objective science, the words and deeds of revered philosophers, and successful conquests of Others providing rationalizations, the health of nations came to be predicated on the racial purity of the bodies comprising them. Racial purity was both goal and rationalization for who should lead and who should be subjugated, who should live and who should die. Of course, such biological and social purity was constantly under threat by intermarriage in the colonies, marriage across classes, outlawed sexual practices and people exhibiting strengths and weaknesses not considered natural to their place in the hierarchy—thus necessitating a constant disciplining of behaviours and expectations through education, law, and social proscription (Stoler 1995, 102 & 2006, 23-70). Racism based on biological determinism was openly embraced. It was, however, a system that required constant policing to maintain the boundaries between categories of human worth.

### **The New Racism**

It is no longer acceptable in contemporary discourse to treat racial identities as determinants of evolutionary development.<sup>15</sup> Taxonomies justifying the exclusion or suppression of Others based on race persist, however, having shifted into new forms. Instead of arguing that “biological necessity” justifies differential access to rights, for instance, the concept of “cultural difference” is now used to account for differential access to citizenship, economic and social standing.

Paul Gilroy describes this transmutation of “natural” order into “cultural” order:

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The New Racism endorsed the annexation of the idea of natural difference by the claims of mutually exclusive, national cultures that now stood opposed to one another. In the political geometry of nation-states, culture was offset not by nature but by other cultures. What seems new about the New Racism, twenty years after this insight was first employed, is not so much the tell-tale emphasis on culture that was its intellectual hallmark but the way its ideologues refined the old opposites—nature and culture, biology and history—into a new synthesis: a bioculturalism that...drew its deterministic energy from the intellectual resources supplied by sociobiology. (2000, 33)

Biological determinism has been transformed into “cultural determinism”—a concept that functions, nonetheless, to justify access to resources and the right to exist, based on race. Within the framework of cultural determinism, people continue to be “essentialized,” moral, psychological and social attributes continue to be differentially ascribed to groups of people, and difference continues to be conceptualized as a threat. Mahood Mamdani refers to this shift from the language of biological to cultural determinism as “Culture Talk”:

Culture Talk assumes that every culture has a tangible essence that defines it, and it then explains politics as a consequence of that essence. Culture Talk about 9/11, for example, qualified and explained the practice of "terrorism" as "Islamic." (2004, 17)

The logic Mamdani outlines functions as follows: if terrorism can be described as a cultural characteristic of Islam, then people who practice Islam are subject to being unduly influenced by their religion; therefore, they are less rational and less evolved (less human) than Westerners. This logic has grave consequences for those deemed less human. It underlies, for example, the justification of practices such as the 10-year economic embargo that caused the death of hundreds of thousands of Iraqi children. In the words of then United States Ambassador to the United Nations Madeline Albright, this loss of life was “worth it”—a claim that only makes sense if we accept that the lives of Iraqi children are understood as having less value than the lives of North American or European children.<sup>16</sup>

Further manifestations of the practice of creating categories of the “worthy and unworthy” or “human and less human,” are found in practices associated with immigration, refugee status and rights to citizenship. Those who are not citizens do not receive full legal protections and are vulnerable to forms of violence from which citizens are understood to be protected (see Diken & Lausten 2005; Razack 1998/2006). While it is not the work of this essay to explore these issues in detail, I include reference to them here to suggest that difference,

and the categories “us” and “them,” continue to have political force. Cultural determinism is every bit as pernicious as biological determinism, if not more so, because it hides the racism it represents behind a guise of pluralism. Under pluralism, all cultures are equal. However, within our current system and the discourses that describe relationships amongst cultures, all cultures are not equal: rather, “we” are “first amongst equals.” Multiculturalism, a concept usually considered to represent a move away from racist attitudes, presents us with a case in point.

### **The Multiculturalism Example**

Within a liberal framework, multiculturalism represents proof of liberalism’s capacity to expand and adapt as more people become entitled to the benefits of citizenship. Multiculturalism suggests that we are a pluralistic culture that embraces “difference.” We sample the cuisine, “costumes” and music of different cultures and see ourselves as worldly, well-informed and “tolerant.”<sup>17</sup> However, these claims cannot be sustained when considered through the lens of post-colonial critiques.

Canadian multiculturalism originated as a policy during the height of the Quebec Separatist Movement. Politically, it had less to do with welcoming non-whites into the Canadian body politic than creating a means to undermine the moral authority of the separatists (Bannerji 1997, 23-41 & 2000). As a strategic move within the politics of race, many activists of color also understand state mandated multiculturalism as a tool intended to contain the dissent of “people of colour” (Carty & Brand 1993; Case 2002; Bannerji 2000). It promises pluralism but separates people into identifiable categories that function to define different levels of belonging and entitlement. Thus, while multiculturalism signifies a commitment to “inclusion,” it actually creates *definitional exclusion*. It is used to maintain distinctions between those who are the original founders of the nation state and those who are defined as adjuncts and outsiders. Multiculturalism facilitates the creation of a narrative in which people “not of color” (that is, “white people”<sup>18</sup>) can claim to be the “original” inhabitants of a country they have built. Further, while multiculturalism does not include reference to First Nations peoples, it clutters the conceptual landscape in such a way as to erase aboriginal histories from the formation of the nation and renders invisible the histories of the many different immigrants of colour who

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provided forms of labour from the beginning of the colonization process. Himanji Bannerji describes this functioning of state mandated multiculturalism as follows:

If we consider this official or elite multiculturalism as an ideological state apparatus we can see it as a device for constructing and ascribing political subjectivities and agencies for those who are seen as legitimate and full citizens and others who are peripheral to this in many senses.... We need to repeat that there is nothing natural or primordial about cultural identities—religious or otherwise—and their projection as political agencies. In this multiculturalism serves as a collection of cultural categories for ruling or administering, claiming their representational status as direct emanations of social ontologies. This allows multiculturalism to serve as an ideology, both in the sense of a body of content, claiming that “we” or “they” are this or that kind of cultural identities, as well as an epistemological device for occluding the organization of the social. (2000, 6)

The discourse of multiculturalism serves another important function in how we come to understand ourselves and our political locations: it allows us to see ourselves as pluralists. This is an ahistorical view that lets us feel good about ourselves, but it is not accurate. Historically, we are colonizers. Ignoring our history as colonizers allows us to claim a state of innocence while hiding the origins of relationships created out of the colonial imperative to claim land belonging to Others. The discourse of multiculturalism claims inclusivity without acknowledging that there is an implicit frame of reference which is largely Anglo-European. This frame of reference hinges on the notion that we are inviting people to “our” house. The house is occasionally made bigger to accommodate new needs but the idea that the house is “ours” remains steadfast and virtually unquestionable (Spelman 1988, 162-64).

Multiculturalism is a concept that has considerable currency in discussions and debates amongst music educators. In some political contexts it also functions, importantly, as a bulwark against mono-cultural xenophobia. Considering multiculturalism in the context of the history of colonization, however, opens up issues that we might not otherwise notice or consider. These issues, in turn, affect how we analyze what might constitute social justice. I return to this subject when I look more specifically at the articulation of multiculturalism as an ideal within music education.

### **The Disappearance of Racism from the History of the Nation State**

In this section I offer a narrative of the formation of the nation of Canada that produces particular understandings of our history by omitting critical elements of the story that pertain to race. The purpose is to highlight how particular narratives set boundaries around the kind of questions we might ask about causes of injustice. Music's important role in generating representations of national identities further heightens the significance of this line of inquiry.

Canadian and U.S. histories are marked by at least two foundational moments of racism: slavery and the systematic genocide of aboriginal peoples. To the extent that these violent events are even acknowledged to have happened, however, modernist discourses frame them as past events, unconnected to contemporary relations and realities. Within the liberal framework, we are all autonomous individuals, unaffected by categories of difference. The national mythologies of both countries rest on narratives of moral superiority, of heroically conquering the wilderness, of progress wrought through "civilizing" projects, and of creating democratic states within which people from all over the world live together freely. The roles of exploitation and elimination of racial Others in the economic and political development of both countries are largely absent from historical narratives, and from contemporary accounts of social positioning as well.

The following example pertains to the role of the trans-Atlantic slave trade in the social and economic development of Upper and Lower Canada. During Canadian Black History month in 2007, a television vignette was shown repeatedly that dramatizes the actions of a white pioneer woman as she helps a black slave escape across the border into Canada (*Underground Railroad Historical Minute* 2007). This dramatization is consistent with the way Canadians are taught about slavery in school. Our school curricula typically focus on the "underground railroad" in ways that serve to congratulate Canadians on their 'moral superiority' to Americans. What Canadians are generally not taught, however, is that the underground railroad represents a very small number of years in the history of Blacks in Canada. A more comprehensive and accurate Canadian history would acknowledge extensive involvement with the trans-Atlantic slave trade in both Upper and Lower Canada (Cooper 2006), the denial of property rights to black settlers in numerous parts of the country (Sutherland & Holmes 2000), and a "reverse"

underground railroad that many Black people used in order to travel back to “free” states in the United States because conditions were so hostile in many parts of Canada (McKittrick 2006, 96-97; Case 2002, 23). Conventional histories suggest that racism was not foundational to the formation of Canada or its economic development; that Canadians and their governments have always been generally open and tolerant of difference; and that black immigration to Canada is relatively recent. In fact, officially-sanctioned historical narratives suggest that the attitude of whites towards black people has been largely generous and noble. I cannot help but wonder what motivates these ‘creative’ revisions of our national stories: If historical relations are unrelated to present realities, why mask a racist past?

Canadians are frequently represented, at least in the Canadian popular press, as open to difference. Major historical markers that contradict this claim are treated as ‘exceptions’ and as not reflective of core beliefs and practices. Such ‘exceptions’ include the deliberate genocide of native peoples; the use of Chinese labour to build the railways while denying them rights to immigrate with their families;<sup>19</sup> participation in the trans-Atlantic slave trade; the denial of land rights to black settlers; the denaturalization of Canadian citizens of Japanese decent and their subsequent use as forced labor during the second world war; the “None is too many” policy applied to Jews seeking asylum during World War II (Abella & Troper 2000); and a residential school system, instituted in the hopes of achieving what its founder, Duncan Campbell Scott, called a “final solution” to the “Indian problem” (Wright 2003, 340). In contemporary debates, versions of history that omit or ignore the long-term significance of these ‘exceptions’ serve to support narratives in which “true” Canadians require protections lest they be taken advantage of or overrun by ‘lesser’ peoples.

White Canadians are encouraged to see themselves as responsible for building the nation, the not-so-subtle implication being that Others are here because of the generosity of these “original” Canadians. Unfortunately, the racialized issue of who belongs and who is an outsider is not an anomaly in Canadian history. Distinctions between “legitimate” Canadians and “outsiders” continue to determine who is protected by laws of citizenship and who is vulnerable to unconstrained power.<sup>20</sup> Contemporary manifestations of this practice of defining people so as to situate them outside of the protection of law include the unrestricted incarceration (without

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charge) of Muslim men suspected of posing terrorist threats, and a “No Fly List” that represents the withdrawal of civil liberties without bringing required formal charges (CBC News 2004; Canadian Security Intelligence Service 2005; Off 2007). These contemporary practices of expulsion from the body of the nation are treated as necessary ‘exceptions’ due to extreme circumstances. But the arguments used are consistent with rationalizations for ‘exceptions’ that have occurred throughout Canadian history. History that fails to account for the exclusions generated as Canadian society defines itself, its citizens and its values leaves us ill-prepared to assess the utility of the modernist ideals of social justice that we claim as our inheritance.

I have surveyed some effects of colonization and racial thinking in order to introduce ideas that should, at the least, unsettle assumptions about the “disinterestedness” or neutrality of modernist ways of conceptualizing social and political relations. The contradictions between the stated ideals of the Enlightenment and relationships based on group identities are not easily interrogated within the modernist framework. Vested interests are masked as “objective” truth and relations forged as the result of *group* definitions are articulated in terms of *individual* agency, thus limiting our understandings of “who we are” and how “we” have come to our current political locations. Such limited understandings seriously compromise our capacity to understand causes of injustice.

## PART 2:

### A CRITIQUE OF LIBERAL CONSTRUCTS AS EXPRESSED BY SEVERAL MUSIC EDUCATION PHILOSOPHERS

In this part of my essay I look at several modernist ideas foundational to the work of Bennett Reimer, David Elliott and Paul Woodford and consider these ideas in light of critiques raised through critical race and post-colonial, feminist analyses. I argue that the political locations evident when we consider the place of music as a site of cultural contestation challenge the validity of some of these foundational concepts and open up space to consider different kinds of questions about the place of music in different people’s lives and how we might develop concepts of social justice within the field of music education.

### **Bennett Reimer, Universality and “Disinterested Reason”**

Bennett Reimer’s foundational argument is that music represents a unique form of cognition that all human beings should have the opportunity to develop (1989, 11, 28, 80). Beyond establishing an account in which music is a particular way of knowing, Reimer’s project is to identify unique, universal values that can be ascribed to music with the goal of proving the inherent value of school music education. He cautions against making philosophical arguments based on the need for advocacy and does, indeed, present arguments that are far more nuanced than those usually used in advocacy efforts. However, a dominant and pervasive theme in Reimer’s writing is the need to justify the work of professional music educators. Reimer writes,

These burgeoning ideas allow music educators to affirm, with great courage, with great hope, and with great relief, that music must be conceived as all the great disciplines of the human mind are conceived--as a basic subject with its unique characteristics of ways to know and ways to be intelligent, that must be offered to all children if they are not to be deprived of its values. This affirmation has the power to strengthen the teaching and learning of music in the schools. At one stroke it establishes music as among the essential subjects in education, prescribes the direction music education must take if it is to fulfill its unique educational mission, gives the profession a solid philosophical grounding, and provides the prospect that music education will play a far more important role for society in the future than it has in the past. (2003, 5)

Reimer argues that music embodies an “ineffable” essence (2003, 163)<sup>21</sup> that is common across all cultures, in all contexts. This argument functions well to justify a universal commitment to music education; however, it does not do the work needed to bring issues of social justice and various political locations into view. In the 1970 and 1989 editions of his *A Philosophy of Music Education*, Reimer argues that works of music should be conceived as autonomous objects, separate from social context and embodying the universal, transcendent and sublime (1989, 27, 91, 103). In his 2003 edition, Reimer is more willing to allow that social context may have some bearing on our understanding of music. However, while allowing this as an abstract possibility, he vehemently rejects actual claims that relations of power and social values may be evident in musical genres, works, and performance practices (52-59). Reimer claims a synergistic approach to music education that, he argues, is capable of accommodating competing discourses about the absoluteness or contingency of musical values. However, by characterizing such discourses as “extreme” he attempts to undercut serious consideration of

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those that challenge his own universalizing claims. His dismissal of contingency and particularity is, in part, a by-product of the goal to establish universal values. Identifying values that apply universally requires reducing the complexities of musical social histories to an essence narrow enough to fit all musics. Unfortunately, this eliminates serious consideration of music as a social force, as an expression of social identity, and a locus of socially contested meanings.

Peter McLaren argues that understanding cultural relations also means recognizing social conflict:

[W]hen we try to make culture an undisturbed space of harmony and agreement where social relations exist within cultural forms of uninterrupted accords we subscribe to a form of social amnesia in which we forget that all knowledge is forged in histories that are played out in the field of social antagonisms. (quoted in hooks 1994, 31)

If we consider that music, like other cultural forms of action, is also “played out within the field of social antagonisms” and we explore the social history of the production of different musics, we can learn a great deal about the specific ways that music has been employed to assert identities as well as to contest and forge social relations. The work of Richard Leppert (1989), for example, focuses on analyzing the social history of the music of the middle classes during the period of Empire. At that time the emerging middle classes were seeking to establish their own power and authority in opposition to the power and authority of the nobility. Leppert writes that

music was an acknowledged means of establishing caste: it was a vehicle by which to establish and maintain—via non-verbal and emotive means—a sufficient level of prestige to help authorize and therefore help stabilize position. (25)

Leppert elaborates on this idea below, arguing that music came to be conceptualized as a means of demarcating class distinctions and identities.

Prior to the early Renaissance, concern with the codification of music (in the production of music theory, compositional strategy, and performance practice) had been the primary concern of ecclesiastical writers and musicians. Now, however, codification became a general concern in elite secular society as well. What had for Churchmen been governed by the need for orthodoxy, in elite secular society was increasingly governed by the need for self- and class-differentiation. Music, that is, was increasingly recognized for its potential agency in stabilizing and authorizing hierarchical social position and the various means by which position was gained and held. With the exponential increase in the articulation of separate musics—especially by the codification of secular art music as distinct from all other musics—the theorization of musical sound on the Platonic continuum of order and disorder was substantially reinvigorated: not only would the

wrong kind of music make you into the wrong kind of person, but also the wrong kind of music carried no status; the right kind of music set you apart. (27)

I have quoted Richard Leppert at length because his work introduces ideas not considered within Reimer's universalizing framework. Leppert's analyses of visual art works and the music, musicians, and instruments depicted within them demonstrate how sound and image are employed together to establish class relations.

Similar class (and race) lines are evident today with the contrast between "prestige" art forms<sup>22</sup> associated with corporate and government sponsorship, and resistant forms such as rap, reggae and North American "folk" music, associated with political protest as well as with alternative representations of race, class and gender. The meaning and function of music produced under American slavery provides another example of music's sociopolitical power to contest subjugated identities and forge alternative discourses. Katherine McKittrick, writing from the fields of sociology and human geography, describes the creative and resistant functions of music within black communities:

The terrain of music and music-making is, as many have argued, one of the more vibrant, creative, and complexly private/public spaces in which blackness is articulated. It stages and presents creativity, politics, sex, violence, struggle, and diaspora connections; it is a site of intervention, reinvention, parody, performativity, community, and critique. (2006, 138)

McKittrick notes numerous social and political concerns and strategies expressed or enacted in and through music—concerns that, explored in detail, might tell us a great deal about what is at stake in performances of identity and culture at any historical moment. Reimer's universalizing definition of music as "ineffable"—a claim that seeks to situate music outside the political and social<sup>23</sup>—encourages us to overlook questions about how each of us is situated in relation to contemporary musical identities. Social, economic, and political issues are left unasked because these relations are treated as irrelevant. Reimer expresses this separation from the world of social conflict in the following passage:

There is a "music-world," in this view, a world in which all young people need to be involved so they can experience the ways of being that music makes possible, ways treasured by humans for the special qualities they add to our lives. All of us who have devoted our lives to music, whether as performers, composers, improvisers, teachers,

scholars, and so on, are aware that we dwell in the world of music, a realm with its own identity. (2003, 60)

In this passage, Reimer suggests that there is a single, unified “music world” which is shared by everyone who engages with (any kind of) music.

I argue, however, that this view overlooks important distinctions. The world of the classically trained musician (the “we” located at the centre of Reimer’s arguments) is markedly different, for example, from the musical and social worlds of rock musicians, gospel singers and First Nations drummers. While each group is engaged in the use of sound as a means of creating meaning and experience, what is understood by each group as important to their experiences with music and their role and place in the social fabric is significantly different. The claim that we are all part of one world of shared experience and value trivializes the distinctions among different musical practices and among those who engage in these practices. Significantly, Reimer does distinguish between the essential characteristics of Western classical music and other (non-classical) kinds. In the following passage he suggests that the “we” of his audience is distinct from the “they” who produce “popular” music.

It is time—no, beyond the time—for us to embrace the foreign (to us) music of popular culture as worthy of our best efforts as educators, efforts to enhance its pleasures, broaden its understanding and appreciation, and contribute meaningfully to its ongoing vitality.

Doing so will force us to face many vexing questions of the relation of music to social issues, to morality in the commonplace sense, to politics, decorum, and on and on with the interface of music and life so explicitly present in this literature. (2003, 195)

Here, Reimer sets up a distinction between an “us,” positioned at the normative centre, and a “them,” situated outside that centre. “Foreign” or “popular” musics produced *within* Western countries do not signify Western culture in the same sense as classical music. Reimer states further that it is through an engagement with the “popular” that we will encounter the social and political thus suggesting that the music he associates with “us,” that is, classical music, stands outside of the social and political. Consequently, the history of conflict represented through art works, including battles for positioning between classical and popular art forms, are hidden from view. Here, classical music is portrayed as standing above the “messy contentious arena of social change” (53) and we see again the idea that “we” Western classical musicians are “first amongst equals.”

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Reimer's attempts to create a universal approach while insisting on the political neutrality of musical practices (unless, that is, they are popular musical practices), reflects the modernist tendency to claim a position of disinterestedness that effectively masks the values of the status quo. This orientation to philosophy limits what can be considered as evidence and encourages Western-trained music educators to see themselves as at the normative centre, separated from a world in which meaning, as expressed through culture, is continually contested. Leppert's analyses of the use of music to establish caste and McKittrick's articulation of the function of music to contest and create identities point to the necessity of noticing the political relations expressed in and through cultural products. They serve as examples of the kind of questions and concerns (social justice not least among them) that emerge when we move beyond modernist claims of disinterestedness and neutrality.

### **David Elliott and Multiculturalism**

In *Music Matters*, Elliott writes at length about multiculturalism as a social ideal<sup>24</sup> and argues that it is through engagement with music itself that people from different cultures can learn to live and work together.

I shall take a leap of faith at this point and suggest that the induction of students into different music cultures may be one of the most powerful ways to achieve a larger educational goal: preparing children to work effectively and tolerantly with others to solve shared community problems. (Elliott 1995, 293)

In Elliott's view, understandings of Otherness—one of the primary goals of the humanist education that Elliott espouses—develops as one pursues musical development through multicultural musical experiences (309). This proposition is based on two assumptions: The first is that not *understanding* difference is a primary cause for social conflict and the second is that participating in “foreign” cultural practices will lead students to want greater equality. “Difference,” however, cannot be said, to confer political significance in and of itself. “Difference” only has substantive political meaning when power is brought to bear to enforce differential access to resources based on markers that separate people into categories of entitlement. Within the liberal framework it is argued that changing individual attitudes is at the root of addressing inequality because we are all autonomous individuals engaging in contracts

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with each other. However, this focus on changing the “individual” neglects the way people are treated differentially, as functions of inclusion or exclusion from identified groups.<sup>25</sup> Changing the attitudes of individuals is politically useful insofar as it can be translated into concrete political action and change. But, focusing on the individual also functions to occlude *systemic* issues. Further, while developing an appreciation of cultures other than one’s own *may* encourage students to think more broadly about music, it does not require that they consider the social and political situatedness of people and therefore neglects potentially important material concerns. Multiculturalism as an ideal fails to address the *political* or *material* effects of categories of difference; thus it fails to open up space to explore such issues.

Elliott states that Canada represents a society that endorses multicultural ideals. However, he does not examine this ideal in terms of the actual relationships that determine equality or inequality in Canadian society; nor does he take into account critiques written by those directly affected by multicultural policies. As a result, he leaves the impression that the ideal of multiculturalism is attainable simply by opening our minds to new experiences, suggesting in turn that cultural conflict is primarily an attitudinal problem of individuals.

Alternatively, Donald Macedo (2003) suggests,

One cannot teach conflict as if, all of a sudden, it fell from the sky. The conflict must be anchored in those competing histories and ideologies that generated the conflict in the first place. (24)

When social relations are seen ahistorically and reduced to mere matters of “difference” we tend not to ask questions about the underlying legal, material, or economic conditions that have led to differential access to resources. Sherene Razack (2004) offers a further critique of ahistorical approaches to “cultural exploration” below:

What makes the cultural differences approach so inadequate in various pedagogical moments is not so much that it is wrong, for people in reality are diverse and do have culturally specific practices that must be taken into account, but that its emphasis on cultural diversity too often descends, in a multicultural spiral, to a superficial reading of differences that makes power relations invisible and keeps dominant cultural norms in place. The strategy becomes inclusion and all too often what Chandra Mohanty has described as ‘a harmonious, empty pluralism.’ Cultural sensitivity, to be acquired and practiced by dominant groups, replaces, for example, any concrete attempt to diversify the teacher population. (9)

For music students, as other cultural explorers and cultural tourists, it is all too easy to consume and appropriate the work of Others without questioning the economic and social privilege that enables such “consuming” practices. Razack (1998/2006) quotes bell hooks as she articulates concerns that are often absent from discussions of multiculturalism in music education.

To make one’s self vulnerable to the seduction of difference, to seek an encounter with the Other, does not require that one relinquish one’s mainstream positionality. When race and ethnicity become commodified as resources for pleasure, the culture of specific groups, as well as the bodies of individuals, can be seen as constituting an alternative playground where members of dominating races, genders, sexual practices affirm their power-over in intimate relations with the Other.

Thus the ‘desire to make contact with those bodies deemed Other, with no apparent will to dominate, assuages the guilt of the past, even takes the form of a defiant gesture, where one denies accountability and historical connectedness.’ (5)

By presenting these critiques I am not suggesting that multiculturalism is devoid of radical potential. Multiculturalism does function, in some circumstances, as a bulwark against xenophobia and white panic.<sup>26</sup> However, if one’s goal is social justice, it is essential to consider multiculturalism and any use we might make of it within the context of music education from a thoroughly historicized perspective. Elliott expresses an ideal but looks at this ideal ahistorically. In so doing he exhibits a philosophical orientation consistent with the idea that we are autonomous individuals, that, regardless of intentions, fails to notice the significance of group relations and the political effects of categories of difference. The issues I have raised regarding multiculturalism suggest that the ways we come to study and ‘know’ Others are not innocent. It is not so much understandings of Others that we require as understandings of how we have constructed the Other and the hierarchical relationships that derive from these constructions.

### **Paul Woodford, Liberal Exclusions and Salvationist Narratives**

In *Democracy and Music Education* Paul Woodford (2005) argues for a reevaluation and reacceptance of the principles of abstract reason and liberal education. Woodford’s principal argument is that music educators need to recognize the importance of engaging in the political process within a rationalist, liberal democratic system. Woodford positions himself at the “sensible” centre (44), free from any political agenda, while describing those with whom he

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disagrees (feminists and post-modernists) as having views that are extreme, reductive, and representative of frightening projects of social engineering (39, 53). Although he represents his position as moderate, reasonable and apolitical, claims of political neutrality are, as I have already noted, not “disinterested.” Rather, they are unstated endorsements of the status quo. Within liberal frameworks, it is not necessary to deal with evidence if the bearers of that evidence can be portrayed as irrational (i.e., less than fully human) or as representing self-serving or “particularist” political agendas (41). Consistent with the positions of Enlightenment philosophers, Woodford claims that objectivity is not only possible, but is a characteristic of his ‘neutral,’ ‘apolitical,’ viewpoint.

In the following passage, Woodford stakes out what he believes rightly belongs in rational liberal discourse:

We [have to be] tolerant and open-minded, meaning that we have to be willing to open ourselves up to the world and listen to, what others with competing truth claims have to say (including those in positions of authority), and to attempt to arrive at some level of mutual understanding and respect. This precludes any assumptions about systemic oppression...if we are to avoid, or at least minimize, blind prejudice and the vicissitudes of the politics of blame. (49)

Here we learn that while we should practice open-mindedness, the concepts “systemic oppression” and “blame” are inadmissible. By requiring that discussions begin from a place of ahistorical innocence, abstract ideals can thus be considered as if their endorsement bears no material consequence. In this way it is possible to claim objectivity while keeping tight control over whose experiences get to count as evidence. Woodford’s insistence that oppression does not presently exist (6) is linked to his notion that inequality is the result of “natural” differences in ability.

People were naturally varied, or unequal, in their respective talents. They were not created equal. This was all the more reason why a democratic principle of equality was needed as a guide to the rule of law. For unless all individuals were treated as equals before the law and by the institutions governing society, the strong and the gifted would use their powers to oppress the weak and less gifted. (3)

In Woodford’s view, then, inequality is due to natural, not political factors. By stating that his views are neutral and labeling voices that challenge this viewpoint as extreme, Woodford lays

claim to a position of innocence that, in turn, presumes to be beyond scrutiny. Razack (1998/2006) addresses several of these issues.

The daily realities of oppressed groups can only be acknowledged at the cost of the dominant group's belief in its own natural entitlement. If oppression exists, then there must also be oppressors, and oppressors do not have a moral basis for their rights claims. If, however, we are all equally human, with some of us simply not as advanced or developed as others, then no one need take responsibility for inequality. Moreover, advanced civilized people can reconfirm their own superiority through helping those who are less advanced. (23)

In Woodford's liberal framework, claims to disinterested reason eliminate consideration of the *political* construction of categories of "difference," enabling the dubious conclusion that the vast inequities of the contemporary world are the result of natural causes. From this it follows that our duty as "naturally" superior, "rational" subjects is to "lift up" those who are "naturally weaker." The notion of superiority sets the stage for salvationist narratives in which the West has an "heroic" obligation to bring civilization to the "less developed"—an approach to dealing with Others that inevitably reinforces relations of dominance and oppression.

Notions about the "natural" superiority of the West are further reinforced by an understanding of democracy as inherently good and intrinsically Western. In Woodford's view, democracy defines the relations of the West with the rest of the world. "Democracy is 'who we in the West are.' Democracy is an expression of our own particular history and inevitable ethnocentrism (79)." But who is the 'we' in this definition of the West? Does the "inevitable ethnocentrism" of our Western history and its relationship with democracy refer to the Six Nations tribes whose democratic concepts may have been models for the American Constitution?<sup>27</sup> The managerial class, represented by Duncan Campbell Scott that instituted the violently anti-democratic residential schools? Or the black and native slaves, defined as chattel, not persons, whose labour built the economy of Montreal in the 18<sup>th</sup> century? The ethnocentrism to which Woodford refers is that of white Canadians of European decent. Razack (2004) addresses the claim to this kind of ethnocentrism in the following passage:

This national mythology has always depended on race. It is informed by the notion that 'we' know about democracy and 'they' do not; 'we' have values of integrity, honesty, and compassion that 'they' do not; that 'we' are a law-abiding, orderly, and modest people while 'they' are not. As an immigrant to Canada from the Third World, I have long understood that the 'we' is a white category and that it refers to people who imagine

themselves to be the original citizens (Aboriginal peoples are considered dead or dying and people of colour are considered recently arrived). (13)

By saying that “democracy is “who we are in the West” Woodford subscribes to an idealized and restricted narrative of our past. The ideals of democracy, like the ideals of reason, have been used to justify different treatment for different peoples at significant moments in Canadian (though not only in Canadian) history. The “we” in the above statement does not refer to those Canadians who have been denied personhood. Rather, it refers to those who understand themselves to be the “normative white centre” (Bradley 2006), entitled to lead and understand themselves as superior.

Commenting on David Goldberg’s work about the function of difference in liberal thinking, Linda Alcoff states that

the universal sameness that [is] so important for the liberal self require[s] a careful containment and taxonomy of difference. Where rights require sameness, difference must be either trivialized or contained in the Other across a firm and visible border.’(In Razack 1998/2006, 17)

In Woodford’s claim about democracy, boundaries between “us” and “them,” in this case the unacknowledged political categories of “difference,” are normalized as a function of ethnicity. Categories, with their implied borders, are clearly articulated but the power relations manifest in those categories remain hidden from view. In a later passage Woodford argues that “abstract reason” can provide the means to resolve all cultural and historical differences.

Abstract reason, thus conceived, is a kind of social contract. It is a means of effecting changes in self and society that is colored and shaped by the constitutive goals, standards, and practices of the democratic societies in question. Included among those constitutive goals, standards and practices are prior and existing standards of truth, beauty, and justice. (4)

The limits of Woodford’s perspective come vividly into view when we consider how such putatively disinterested concepts as “existing standards of truth, beauty, and justice” function in the context of colonial relationships. For colonized peoples, Western standards of truth and beauty have functioned, not as “normal,” but as normative and “normalizing.” Mi’kmaq writer, Marie Battiste (2005), articulates it this way:

Universality underpins cultural and cognitive imperialism, which establishes a dominant group’s knowledge, experience, culture, and language as the universal norm. Dominators

(or colonizers) reinforce their culture and values by bringing the oppressed and the colonized under their expectations and norms. (124)

The violence of the residential schools offers a particularly poignant example of normalizing practices. Students were punished for using their own language and were forced to adopt particular views of “truth” and “justice”—views which defined their persons as vile, primitive and dirty (Smith 2005, 9). “Existing standards of truth, beauty and justice” were used as weapons of oppression in this context. The irony of the claim to disinterestedness becomes clear when we consider that *existing* standards were actually those of aboriginal people. The standards forcibly imposed were those of the newcomers. It is particularly important to notice how inflicting these standards was argued to be in the ‘best interests’ of the First Nations children removed from their families and subjected to such calculated cruelty. “We” knew what was best and set out to ‘raise up’ these ‘primitive’ Others—a salvationist narrative of the first order. When we consider “truth” claims through the lenses of critical race theory and post-colonial feminist analysis, it becomes apparent that such claims need to be considered in light of their relationship to particular power structures. Existing standards, in whatever time and place they originate, are never disinterested, never neutral.

The exclusions that Goldberg and many others identify as foundational to modernist thinking remain unnamed and unnoticed in Woodford’s arguments for a renewed commitment to liberal ideals. Thus, Woodford’s re-articulation of liberal ideals constrains in unacceptable ways the questions we are able to consider. As a result, we find ourselves restricted to ideas that serve particular, but unacknowledged, interests.

#### CONCLUSIONS

We in the West are all children of the Enlightenment—including those, like myself, who critique Enlightenment ideals. The belief in the possibilities of justice, fairness and equality of rights that underpin this paper come out of Enlightenment thinking. However, we have seen that these ideas also have functioned effectively to justify colonization, slavery and the imposition of all manner of violence on those deemed less than fully human. The rationales for these practices, presented as “disinterested” and “objective,” have always served the interests of those making the claims. Sadly, the pursuit of land and resources belonging to Others continues to motivate a

discourse that rationalizes violence in the name of civilization. The current wars in Iraq and Afghanistan are argued to be in the best interest of the peoples of those countries, as “we” bring our “superior” form of government to their “primitive” cultures. Whether or not readers sympathize with Western involvement in these wars, it is important to notice that the salvationist narrative that has brought so much shame to Western nations through their treatment of indigenous peoples (amongst others) is strikingly similar to narratives used to justify violent interventions in contemporary contexts. These narratives function to mask investments in particular orderings of the world. As autonomous individuals, we can all claim innocence; however, this claim interferes with our ability to ask questions about how social hierarchies have come to be as they are.

We ask students to develop media literacy so that they will not accept the words of advertisers as disinterested truths. We need to ask ourselves, as teachers interested in social justice, to develop tools that help us look critically at the discourses that frame contemporary relations as if they were also the result of disinterested, objective movements of history. We do not need to supplant one source of “truth” for another: rather, we need to consider very carefully claims of “disinterestedness,” objectivity and “existing standards of truth and beauty.” Liberal discourse tends to mask relations based on group identities while claiming that no such relations exist. Elements of liberal discourse, used uncritically and ahistorically, fail to provide us with tools that can help us understand causes of injustice and our implicatedness in systems that continue to produce injustice. Locating ourselves in these systems is crucial to understanding the difference between interventions that replicate dominant/subordinate relations and interventions that might lead to positive change.

The categories of race, gender and class are important to understanding the construction of social relations reflected in and produced through social practices—including musical practices, which are inextricably social—but we must remind ourselves that these categories do not reflect *intrinsic* characteristics of music any more than they reflect intrinsic characteristics of people. Categories used to “define” people’s essences function within particular social and political contexts. When we pay attention to identities associated with different musics, we are

not discovering the “truth” about identities; rather, we are paying attention to what is at stake, socially, politically, materially and economically in specific cultural contexts.

The literatures of critical race theory and post-colonial feminist theory provide us with analytical tools that help us to notice our political locations and our investments in particular ways of seeing the world. Without tools to analyze how injustice is produced we are likely to adopt salvationist approaches that follow from an uncritical acceptance of liberal democratic ideals. Having the tools to ask a broader set of questions is particularly important to the field of music education when we consider that the demographic make-up of music educators is almost entirely middle class and white.<sup>28</sup> Our explorations of ‘truth’ and the histories and perspectives brought to the table under these circumstances will be limited if we are only talking with people who have been screened by the same criteria. If we are to come to understand anything beyond our own frames of reference, we need to look outside our profession, look outside what we perceive to be “normal,” and look beyond comfortable versions of history. We also need to listen to those who have to fight to be heard. One way to move beyond comfortable frames of reference is to engage with literatures that look in depth at the political function of categories of difference. In this way, we have the possibility of challenging ourselves to move beyond the self-congratulatory, to engage in the far messier world of social and political conflict—the realm where battles for social justice inevitably take place.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> I am indebted to Maureen Ford for the challenges and insights into philosophical discourses she has shared throughout the writing of this paper. I would also like to thank Elizabeth Gould and the reviewers of this essay for their helpful critiques of an earlier version of this paper. Any shortcomings, failings, or omissions are exclusively my own.

<sup>2</sup> For contemporary examples of exclusions that function to set constraints on who is considered human, consider the definitions that have been changed in order to deny people legal protections in the operation of the POW camp at Guantánamo Bay. Here, definitions of soldier and enemy combatant have been altered in order to exclude POW’s from the rights of the Geneva Convention. Words, without reference to material reality, are allowed to determine one’s legal status. See [www.amnesty.org/pages/guantanamobay-index-eng](http://www.amnesty.org/pages/guantanamobay-index-eng) for more details.

<sup>3</sup> “Forefathers” is used ironically here. Women were not legally persons in Canada until 1929. First Nations peoples, governed by the paternalistic Indian Act, still do not have the same legal rights as other people living in Canada.

<sup>4</sup> “We” is often used in liberal discourse as if there were a universal “we” to whom it is possible to refer. As will become apparent later in this paper, “we” more often than not assumes a shared background of race, class and education.

<sup>5</sup> State violence of this sort is evident, for example, in the legitimization of the removal of homeless persons from neighborhoods in the vicinity of international political or even sporting events such as the G7 summit meetings or the Olympic Games.

<sup>6</sup> The forced removal of aboriginal children from their families and communities to place them in residential schools charged explicitly with destroying their connections to their language, value-systems and social structures, rationalized as an effort made to ‘civilize’ “them,” a project undertaken ‘in their own best interest’ serves as a case in point – all the more dramatic for its absence from public school history textbooks and curricula.

<sup>7</sup> There is certainly philosophy of music education literature that is also resistant and identifies many of the issues I raise. This includes work by Julia Koza (1994, 2003), Roberta Lamb (1994, 1996, 2004), Estelle Jorgensen (2003), Elizabeth Gould (2004, 2005, 2006, 2007), Patricia O’Toole (2002, 2005), Deborah Bradley (2006), and others. Questions about race and colonization are explored in a number of musicological texts, for example, Radano & Bohlman (2000), Leppert (1987, 1989, 1993) and in the field of human geography by writers such as Leyshon, Matless & Revill (1998); George Revill (2000) and Susan J. Smith (1997, 2000). Sociologist Rinaldo Walcott (1997, 2001, 2005) also offers insights into Rap, Hip Hop and other musical practices of resistance that are relevant to music educators.

<sup>8</sup> The chorus of the Finale to Beethoven’s Ninth Symphony as heard in a concert performance, in Stanley Kubrick’s film, *A Clockwork Orange*, and on a contemporary commercial for milk.

<sup>9</sup> It should be noted that my use of the term status quo is not, in and of itself, intended to be pejorative. The point is that the status quo is not neutral. There are always interests represented in whatever ideas and practices are dominant at any given time and place.

<sup>10</sup> Full maturity was an ideal that could only be achieved through the proper nurturing of white male boys. (Lesko 2001, 11).

<sup>11</sup> Definition of Manifest Destiny from [http://www.answers.com/topic/manifest-destiny#US\\_History\\_Companion](http://www.answers.com/topic/manifest-destiny#US_History_Companion):

The term manifest destiny originated in the 1840s. It expressed the belief that it was Anglo-Saxon Americans' providential mission to expand their civilization and institutions across the breadth of North America. This expansion would involve not merely territorial aggrandizement but the progress of liberty and individual economic opportunity as well.

The phrase was first employed by John L. O'Sullivan in an article on the annexation of Texas published in the July-August 1845 edition of the *United States Magazine and Democratic Review*, which he edited. It was, O'Sullivan claimed, "our manifest destiny to overspread the continent allotted by Providence for the free

development of our yearly multiplying millions." The term and the concept were taken up by those desiring to secure Oregon Territory, California, Mexican land in the Southwest, and, in the 1850s, Cuba. Originally a partisan Democratic issue, "manifest destiny" gained Republican adherents as time passed. By the end of the century, expansionists were employing quasi-Darwinist reasoning to argue that because its "Anglo-Saxon heritage" made America supremely fit, it had become the nation's "manifest destiny" to extend its influence beyond its continental boundaries into the Pacific and Caribbean basins.

<sup>12</sup> It was also considered important to baptize slaves. This showed ownership and also allowed the owner to rest assured that they had 'saved the soul' of the slave from the hell reserved for heathens. (See Cooper 2006, 38-39; 75)

<sup>13</sup> From Smith, A. 2005, 56:

A common complaint among colonizers was that indigenous peoples did not properly subdue the natural environment. This reasoning became the colonizer's legal basis for appropriating land from Native peoples. For instance, John Winthrop of the Massachusetts Bay colony declared that "America fell under the legal rubric of *vacuum domicilium* because the Indians had not 'subdued' it and therefore had only a 'natural' and not a 'civil' right to it. George E. Ellis said that the Indians "simply wasted everything within their reach...They required enormous spaces of wilderness for their mode of existence." Walter Prescott Webb reasoned that free land was "land free to be taken." This notion that Native peoples did not properly use land and hence had no title to it forms the basis of the "doctrine of discovery" which is the foundation of much U.S. case law relating to Indian land claims.

For a description of the legal and moral constructs used to justify the appropriation of native lands, see also: General Synod of the Anglican Church of Canada, *Doctrine of Discovery and Terra Nullius*. 2007, Anglican Church of Canada; Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada, 21/05/07 <<http://generalsynod.anglican.ca/gs2001/rr/presentations/terranullius.html>>.

<sup>14</sup> For comments on the holocaust see Mamdani 2004.

<sup>15</sup> The work of Canadian-based psychological researcher, J. Phillippe Rushton is very much in the tradition of raciology, that is, racism argued to be justified on the basis of biologically determined attributes. Although his work has been publicly condemned, an internet search shows that this type of work is still receiving major amounts of funding.

<sup>16</sup> From Mamdani 2004, 190:

The moral indefensibility of the sanctions regime was clear as early as 1996, when Madeleine Albright, U.S. ambassador to the UN, was asked by Lesley Stahl on the TV program [60 Minutes] about the price of "containing" Saddam: "We have heard that a half million children have died. I mean, that's more than died in Hiroshima. And, and you know, is the price worth it?" Madeleine Albright responded: "I think this is a very hard choice, but the price, we think the price is worth it."

How, and by whom was such a death toll justified for so long?

<sup>17</sup> I use the word 'tolerant' with irony. The word "tolerance" implies that something unpleasant needs to be accepted.

<sup>18</sup> The term "white" is rarely stated as such; however, "white" is understood to be the norm from which people of colour are deviations.

<sup>19</sup> Lest this example appear dated, consider the current plight of domestic and childcare workers and seasonal agricultural workers whose place in Canada is limited in exactly the same way by contemporary public policy and legislation. See Sharma 2000, Parrenas 2001, and United Food and Commercial Workers Union Canada 2006.

<sup>20</sup> Another category of person not entitled to equality before the law is the refugee claimant who is incarcerated in detention-centers with legal obligations to restrict his or her movement but no access to legal representation or due process. (Diken & Lausten 2005)

<sup>21</sup> Related arguments are found in Reimer 2003 (27, 60, 177, & 191).

<sup>22</sup> For example, Toronto's new Opera Ballet house. For an interesting discussion of the race and class formations reflected in the use of public spaces, see Catungal 2006.

<sup>23</sup> Far from putting it outside the social and political, Reimer's approach effectively establishes the status quo as the norm.

<sup>24</sup> "But *multicultural* also has an evaluative sense. It connotes a social ideal: a policy of support for exchange among different social groups to enrich all while respecting and preserving the integrity of each" (Elliott 1995, 207, emphasis his).

<sup>25</sup> Jim Crow laws, for example, only applied to blacks but affected whites by creating white-only spaces where the labour of blacks could be ignored. The Indian Act only applies to First Nations peoples and controls their relationship to land ownership and resources differently from other Canadian citizens.

<sup>26</sup> Examples of "white panic" are described in Thobani, 2007, p. 181, Lipsitz 2006, p. 67 and in *A Place Called Dixon* (2001). In this film, white residents in an area of high immigration from Somalia describe themselves as a minority threatened by the high numbers of black people "taking over" a space they consider to be theirs.

<sup>27</sup> See Lutz 1998; see also Johansen 1996, 1998, 1999. Thanks to Donna Marchand to drawing my attention to this issue.

<sup>28</sup> Lortie 1975. This study is dated but still largely reflective of the demographics of music educators.

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