

# Enjoying Gospel Drumming: The Problematic Interpretation of Black Musicianship Via Post-Racial Ideology

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## ABSTRACT

In this paper, I will examine the implications of post-racial ideology as a 'progressive' form of anti-racism in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. I argue that post-racial positions can detrimentally effect collective understandings of difference, diminish the persistence of racism and the difficult history of race relations in North America, and pose a number of theoretical issues for the study of popular music and culture. Drawing upon the work of Slavoj Žižek—particularly his theory of *enjoyment* as a political factor—, this study will outline how the capitalistic ideal of instant gratification is invested in post-racial outlooks. As a case study, I will refer to my fieldwork research on Black Pentecostal 'gospel drumming' and the mainstream drumming industry in order to frame this discussion.

## KEY WORDS

Gospel, Black Music, Drumming, Slavoj Žižek, Post-Racism.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Over the past 10 years or so, 'gospel drumming' has become one of the most popular and profitable developments to emerge out of the mainstream drumming industry. Categorized as a new style of drumming with its own advanced skills and techniques, students and educators around the world have appropriated and expanded upon 'gospel' ideas and its themes, integrating them into their own playing and posting a variety of user-generated 'gospel' content on the Internet. The world's largest drum companies have been diligently producing a range of gospel-specific products in response to its growing popularity, including Vater's 'Gospel Series' drumsticks, Pearl's 'Gospel Percussion' Pack, Sabian and Zildjian Cymbals 'Gospel' and 'Praise and Worship' packs, and a variety of educational materials—this includes the Hudson Music Ltd. DVDs, 'Dynamic Drumming 3' with Chris Coleman (2005), 'Aaron Spears: Beyond the Chops' (2009), 'Ultimate Drum Lessons: Gospel and R&B Drumming' (2011), and numerous independent productions, such as the GospelChops.com 'Shed Sessionz' Series (Vol. 1-3; 2005, 2008, 2011), and the 'Gospel Musicians' 'Urban Drumming Techniques: Featuring JLaToiya' DVD (2011).

Transcriptions of gospel drum fills and patterns are regularly included in drum magazines, lesson websites, and instructional videos, and many gospel drummers are featured in interviews, perform at industry trade shows, and endorse a variety of professional drumming products. Within the genres of pop, hip hop, and R&B, gospel drummers perform with the world's biggest names and stars: Britney Spears (Teddy Campbell), Christina Aguilera (Brian Fraser Moore), Mary J. Blige (Rex Hardy, Jr.), Usher (Aaron Spears), Beyoncé (Kim Thompson), Jay-Z (Tony Royster, Jr.), and many others.

The dominant visual and narrative portrayals of gospel drumming texts (i.e. advertisements, magazine covers and interviews, instructional DVDs, etc.) indicate that it has its roots in African American churches—in particular, Baptist and Pentecostal churches (I will be focusing on the latter congregation in this paper). These church drummers incorporate various techniques, musical genres and styles into their playing, including R&B, gospel, hip hop, but also progressive rock, jazz, fusion, punk, and metal. As with many avid drummers from around the world, Black Pentecostal gospel drummers participate in the broader networks of popular drumming culture—consuming products, watching/downloading instructional videos, and reading magazines—, and many have studied music performance at a post-secondary level.

However, the persistent *culturalization* of gospel drumming—the core of its marketed distinction—invokes the specter and signifier of *race*, which is articulated as a celebrated form of musical exclusionism. The cultural framing of gospel drumming directly conflicts with the 'objective' intentions of the mainstream drumming industry: to cultivate drumming professionalism through the detached appropriation and development of various rhythmic traditions and techniques. Subsequently, the widespread reduction of gospel drumming into definitive skills and patterns contradictorily negates the very conditions on which its projected difference is based. This process has generated tensions throughout the drumming community, shaping discourses of gospel drumming around problematically racialized coordinates. Within the 'race-neutral' space of objective drumming technique, markers of *cultural* distinction seem to operate as forms of intangible and mystified difference that appeal to forms of racial thinking.

## 2. BACKGROUND: POST-RACIAL LIBERALISM AND COLORBLINDNESS

Tim Wise defines *post-racial liberalism* as a form of left-of-center politics that emerged after the Civil Rights revolution of

achieved some of its immediate, legislative goals [1; pg. 16]. However, following these developments and major victories for the movement, many of America's scholars, political leaders, and public intellectuals began to focus on non-race-specific remedies and finesse lingering racial inequalities; interested instead in universal, race-neutral, non-specific policies that did not address racial discrimination as a factor [1; pg. 16-28]. One of the key proponents of this development was Daniel Patrick Moynihan in the 1970s. Interestingly, Moynihan advocated for, what he called a 'benign neglect' of racism as a political issue in the United States [1; pg. 30]. More recently, Dinesh D'Souza also stated that "although racism undoubtedly exists, we now live in a 'multiracial' society, which *in itself* reflects an organic transformation of racism; racism, therefore, no longer has the power to thwart Blacks or any other group in achieving their economic, political, and social aspirations" [2; pg. 35, emphasis mine]. In this way, the 'in-itself' reality of multiracial belonging and unity—structured around predominately economic considerations—postpones any direct confrontation with the persistent issues of racism, advocating for the already-existing egalitarianism for all people in liberal democracies.

For many Whites today, according to Charles Gallagher, "colorblindness has become the dominant ideological lens through which Whites understand contemporary race relations" [3; pg. 92]. Post-racist proponents advocate for a 'colorblind universalism,' a form of pragmatism that views radical idealism as 'unreasonable,' citing a cross-racial 'practicality' [1; pg. 64] in contemporary politics; presuming that there are no institutional obstacles faced by people of color that do not simultaneously implicate White citizens on an even playing field [1; pg. 20, 38-39]. For Robert Blauner, "Whites locate racism in color consciousness and its absence of colorblindness, regarding it as a kind of racism when people of color insistently underscore their sense of difference, their affirmation of ethnic and racial membership, which minorities have increasingly asserted" [4; pg. 11-12]. In this case, the reduction of the Other's distinction is necessary for Whites to perpetuate the 'accepting,' universalized and nationalistic colorblind ideology, neutralizing difference so that diversity can be experienced in a society 'without race.' 'Colorblindness' connects skin color historically and spectrally to the profound social and cultural antagonisms that have long existed between Whites and non-Whites in America—however, its proponents deny this connection. The acknowledgment of color is, therefore, presupposed in order to take a colorblind stance, but one ignores or 'sees through' the other's difference. In this sense, colorblindness, as a form of post-racial ideology, acknowledges and simultaneously denies the racial signifier.

According to Gallagher, through colorblind policy, Whites presume socio-economic success as due to individual hard work and determination. The veneer of equality implied in colorblindness allows Whites to present their place in the racialized social structure as one that was earned [3; pg. 93]. Continuing on this point, Eduardo Bonilla-Silva also states that a new form of prejudice has come to prominence, one that is preoccupied with "matters of moral character, informed by the virtues associated with the traditions of individualism. At its center are the contentions that Blacks do not try hard enough to overcome the difficulties they face and that they take what they have not earned. Today...prejudice is expressed in the language

of American individualism" [5; pg. 560]. The inequality that one experiences is, therefore, largely something that is self-imposed, pointing to a lack of individual motivation, and possibly structural deficiencies (i.e., 'cultural' or racial) amidst an atmosphere of non-racial prejudice. Post-racial/colorblind outlooks run the risk of rationalizing racial biases if the impression of racial transcendence is dependent upon economic opportunity—that all citizens have the same rights and freedoms, as well as the financial capability of bettering their situation. With this in mind, it is more likely that any inequality amongst Blacks will appear as due to a cultural or biological flaw [1; pg. 18]. Post-racial/colorblind attitudes effectively allow Whites to define themselves as politically and racially tolerant, removing from public discourse any suggestion of White supremacy or guilt while legitimizing the existing social, political and economic arrangements which privilege Whites [3; pg. 93].

### 3. CULTURALIZING THE OTHER'S DIFFERENCE

#### 3.1 Post-racial multiculturalism:

Post-racial ideologies and attitudes directly impact the ideal and functioning of multiculturalism within Western democratic societies, especially if it were assumed that racism no longer exists (that multiculturalism *in itself* represents anti racism). Subsequently, 'race' and the acknowledgement of racism has progressively retreated from public discourse; 'culture' has been able to function in its place as the implicit signifier for historically racial antagonisms, without the ethical or legal culpability of being overtly racist. In this sense, race has been 'semantically conquered,' but it remains deeply ingrained in the political imaginaries, structures and practices of 'the West' [6; pg. 49].

For Lentin and Titley, the ideal of multiculturalism can only function as long as discrimination and prejudice are understood as being 'cultural,' not racial in origin, assuming that acts of racial discrimination are only limited to misconceptions of biology or genetics [6; pg. 49]. Tensions between the 'dominant' and Othered cultures are acknowledged, containing within them the long-held signifiers of racism—which are predominately, colored with forms of exclusionism; instead, they are 'culturally' coded as being non-racial (i.e., immigration, fundamental religious differences, etc.). However, as Robert Young states, "the racial was always cultural," [6; pg. 51] and discrimination and prejudice against others has become increasingly justified under the language of 'cultural' difference. According to Etienne Balibar, the 'racist complex' inextricably combines a crucial function of misrecognition and a 'will to know,' a violent desire for immediate knowledge of social relations [7; pg. 19]—in other words, an urgent explanation for why the Other is 'the way they naturally are.' For Balibar, current forms of racism can be described as "racism without race," whose dominant theme is "not biological heredity but the 'insurmountability of cultural differences,' a racism which, at first sight, does not postulate the superiority of certain groups or peoples in relation to others, but 'only' the harmfulness of abolishing frontiers: the 'incompatibility of life-styles and traditions' [7; pg. 21]. The racial complex postulates that these 'cultural' differences and antagonisms—the 'incompatibilities'—are *not* racially motivated, even though they are articulated through the

exclusionist and reductive language of racism. Though it has been proven that the idea of different human races have been debunked, presupposing that racism is cognitively incorrect, this does not consider how racial divisions continue to have profound effects on society and politics.

Consequently, any political action by the Other can be framed within its 'cultural' drive—the constellation of the Other's difference. According to Slavoj Žižek, political differences have been naturalized and neutralized into 'cultural' differences, that is, into different "ways of life" which are something given, something that cannot be overcome: they can only be 'tolerated' [8; pg. 140]. However, this process *depoliticizes* the effective content of the Other's beliefs and actions. For Wendy Brown, what it means to discuss the 'culturalization of politics' proceeds from the basis that "every culture has a tangible essence that defines it and then explains politics as a consequence of that essence" [3; pg. 56]. In this way, the 'essence'—the natural, innate-ness of a certain culture (i.e. racialized community)—is maintained within the multicultural Other, "functioning like a nature," [7; pg. 22] but it is articulated as if it has nothing to do with the racial signifier. *Depoliticization* effectively removes a phenomenon "from comprehension of its historical emergence and from (the) recognition of the powers that produce and contour it. No matter its particular form and mechanics, depoliticization always eschews power and history in the representation of its subject" [6; pg. 57]. The mystification of the Other's practices and historical contingencies is essential to the structuring of racial discourses.

### 3.2 Cultural capital(ism):

Compounding the in-itself, superficial understandings of anti-racism under (post-racial) multiculturalism are the processes of late global capitalism—the incessant 'injunction' to consume and enjoy. As Fabio Vighi states, in today's consumer society, enjoyment and anxiety coincide: "Although we know full well that commodities only bring ephemeral and angst-ridden pleasures, our answer to this predicament is to consume more" [9; pg. 55]. There is, as Žižek states, an 'ambiguous overlapping' of surplus-value and surplus-*jouissance* (9; pg. 56) within the structures of global capitalism. Surplus-*jouissance* can be defined as "the senseless libidinal excess emerging with, and disturbing, all attempts at signification" [9; pg. 1]—a 'libidinal surplus,' experienced as a lack, which is ineradicable from the symbolic field, i.e. from any knowledge [9; pg. 11]. We are 'alive,' in the sense that we 'feel the urge to scratch the itch of valorized enjoyment,' [9; pg. 13] and it is through capitalism where we are sold commodities of desirable value that are "the end product of the invisible conversion of surplus-*jouissance* into enjoyment" [9; pg. 42-43]. The 'ruse' of capitalism, however, is that it lies to us by 'surreptitiously hijacking' and converting *jouissance* into value—into something which is valorized and exchanged as commodity with the only aim of generating more value (and *not* of satisfying real needs) [9; pg. 13].

Today, many individuals in the West experience and gain access to Other cultures through consuming cultural commodities. For instance, World Music in Western society often functions as a counter-cultural "bridge to other cultures, representative of a new global age of cultural tolerance and equality, allowing participants to be engaged in the enrichment of all cultures

through the affirmation of his or her own difference" [10; pg. 54]. Through the realities of shared consumption amongst peoples from all over the world, race becomes nothing more than an innocuous cultural signifier [3; pg. 92], often taking racially coded styles and products and reducing these symbols to commodities or experiences that Whites and minorities can purchase and share. The commodification and mass marketing of products that signify color, but are intended for consumption across the color line, further legitimates color blindness [3; pg. 92].

For Timothy Taylor, the flow of commodities, as described through discourses of globalization, has fostered new ways of taming difference in order to commodify it. Americans now currently inhabit a world in which racism, sexism, civil rights, and other important issues 'no longer matter,' an ideology complimented by a form of corporate multiculturalism [11; pg. 126]. These developments can be linked to the politically conservative movements of the early 1980s, characterized by Margaret Thatcher and Ronald Reagan, who skillfully 'sacralized' the 'ideological miracle' of consumption, linking it to the most profound, deep structural values and promises of modernity: personal freedom, economic progress, civic dynamism and political democracy. The rapid commercialization and commodification of 'almost everything' became hyper-realized in the 1980s, as everything became appropriable in the name of making one's identity or music [11; pg. 118]. This 'making' of music and identity within developed countries—as intrinsically tied to the behaviors and values of consumption—paired well with the ideals of cultural relativism (that cultures were merely different from one another, neither superior or inferior, existing in a pluralist world), which became mainstreamed under multiculturalism [11; pg. 119]. However, multiculturalism also entails a greater degree of commodifiable difference, as well as its consumption, often legitimizing entirely new areas of consumerism [11; pg. 123-125]. For instance, White musicians who enjoy and wish to participate in the 'world' music of racialized and ethnicized others can *collaborate* with them, legitimizing their aesthetic and authentic connections through maintaining mutual, multicultural respect [11; pg. 128-129]. However, this kind of relationship with the musical Other can be quickly perverted through the appropriation of an objective, 'non-racial' position, as indicated in the numerous world music records of 'ambiguous,' 'timeless,' 'placeless,' ethnicized sounds, which attempt to ground themselves in a sort of hybrid tradition that is 'authentically' grounded in a *genuine Western respect for the Other* [11; pg. 190-191, emphasis mine].

## 4. PSYCHOANALYTIC CRITIQUES OF MULTICULTURAL ENJOYMENT (ŽIŽEK)

### 4.1 *Jouissance* and racism

According to Žižek, for racism to function psychically, an impossible, unfathomable enjoyment (*jouissance*), allegedly stolen from us, must be attributed to the Other [12; pg. 62]. As Henry Sullivan states, *jouissance* is "predominately attributed as enjoyment of *and* by the Other" (13; pg. 9, emphasis mine)—a form of off-limits, dis-pleasurable ecstasy that is beyond representation. We fantasize about this loss of enjoyment and desire to regain it, and it is this process that best illustrates the most fundamental operation of *racism as an ideological fantasy*.

Within this fantasy, the racialized is simultaneously inferior *and* contains superior strength and the ability to undermine and transgress the authoritative and homogeneous Law (this is both feared, and the source of admiration). Therefore, the logic of racism is, in Žižek's psychoanalytic terms, *the theft of one's own enjoyment* [12; pg. 63]. For Žižek, what bothers us in the Other is that he or she appears to enjoy a privileged relationship to a lost object (the Lacanian *objet petit a*). In turn, there is great envy, a fetishization of the Other. In the repetitive, psychological staging of the racist fantasy scene, I lack access to the *jouissance* of the Other, resulting in a sense of castration: therefore, the Other alone possesses the object of my desire. The fantasy scene functions as a repetitive image, projecting the subject from trauma, which is 'acted out' (performed) in response to a sense of alienation [14; pg. 54]—the other's refusal to listen, or acknowledge our desire. According to Žižek, such fantasies constitute our desire, 'teaches us how to desire' [15; pg. 7]; it provides a schema in which objects that we encounter in reality can function as *objects* of our desire.

The Lacanian formula of the *fetishistic object* accounts for how a surplus of enjoyment can emerge out of a sense of castration; how the 'symbolic articulation of loss' gives rise to a pleasure of its own (to illustrate with a musical example, there is the voice of the castrati, which represents an aesthetic enjoyment and form of 'other-worldly' beauty that is due to a simultaneous pleasurable/perverse lack) [16; pg. 156]. The Lacanian account of *drive* communicates how the process of repeatedly failing to satisfy our desire can become a form of enjoyment in itself—how the painful experience of missing one's goal shifts the focus "from the end to the means when processes and procedures themselves provide libidinal satisfaction" [17; pg. 6-7]. In response to this cyclic loss, we can assume two prominent positions in relation to fantasizing about the *jouissance* of the Other: an 'interpassive' relationship to the Other (who exists outside the prohibitive laws), in which we displace our lack *through* the Other [18; pg. 23-25], allowing them to enjoy 'for us;' and we can objectify the Other as an object for us to enjoy (the fetishized Other), which helps to articulate how, within the racist fantasy, our relationship with the Other is not intersubjective (relations between people), but relations between subjects and objects [17; pg. 24, 26].

## 4.2 Post-ideology and multiculturalism

According to Žižek, as cited by Jodi Dean, "our politics is more and more directly the politics of *jouissance*, concerned with ways of soliciting, or controlling and regulating, *jouissance*" [17; pg. 1]. This enjoyment cannot be signified directly, "as it exceeds symbolization and can only be signified through inconsistencies, holes, and slippages in the symbolic order" [17; pg. 5]. These 'holes' are the intangible differences and accounts in which stand out from the dominant structure of our sense of unified, multicultural nationhood (the Lacanian Thing)—the belief that our collective features, specific traditions, foods, or myths make us who we are: "A nation *exists* only as long as its specific *enjoyment* continues to me materialized in a set of social practices and transmitted through national myths or fantasies that secure these practices" [17; pg. 14]. From this vantage point, Žižek controversially maintains that the ideology and state policy of multiculturalism "demands that the excessive enjoyment of the Other should be curtailed so that everyone's access to *jouissance* is equal" [19; pg. 89]; that the multicultural

injunction is one of 'cultural apartheid,' distanced and remaining 'not to close' to our way of life [20; pg. 46]. In this sense, "the *truly* unbearable fact for a multiculturalist liberal is an Other who *really does* become like us, while retaining their own specific features [20; pg. 46-47]. In short, the distinctions and excesses of the Other, who is understood to be neutralized under the post-racial multicultural ideology, stand out as the ideological 'inconsistencies.' What becomes necessary, as illustrated in the ideology of White colorblindness, is to prohibit the 'excessive' differences that the Other identifies with in order to maintain the (post-racial) multicultural ideal.

For Žižek, multiculturalism is an ideological hegemony, "one that overtakes the reality of the predominant form of social relations" [20; pg. 44], such as the persistent realities of racism, oppression, and inequality today—the so-called 'dark phenomena' of postmodernity: religious fundamentalism, ethnic hatred, sexism and homophobia. But, these issues do not come from outside multicultural, global capitalism (although, we fantasize this to be the case); these antagonisms actually reflect the inner contradictions of global capitalism itself. Like all hegemonic ideologies, "multiculturalism is an ideological *fantasy*, which can potentially conceal forms of racism, violence and inequality; where 'civil' forms of racism (i.e., implicit, or disguised) can only function (in the guise of) the illusion of anti-racist multiculturalism" [20; pg. 44]. In this way, the theft of enjoyment is attributed to the Other, the religious fundamentalist, the illegal immigrant who invades our space of already-existing, 'neutralized' equality. However, this formulation is entirely dependent upon Žižek's critique that we now believe that we are living in a 'post-ideological' world; that the grand ideologies of the past—socialism, feminism, civil rights and racism, for instance—, have been fought and succeeded long ago [21; pg. 323]. By drawing attention to topics, such as racism, we actually 'bring the discourse' of racial inequality into a space 'without race.' However, through this feigned position of liberal-democratic objectivism, Žižek argues that such practices of counter-cultural, Liberal, 'multicultural' consumption reproduces forms of 'reflected racism' (which is paradoxically able to articulate itself in terms of direct *respect* for the other's culture) [19; pg. 4] and 'reversed racism' (celebrating the 'exotic authenticity' of the Other) [20; pg. 47]. Again, the 'genuine' Other is one who is assumed to reside outside our political and social laws—even outside capitalism—, articulating the source of our fetishism.

## 5. CASE STUDY: GOSPEL DRUMMING

### 5.1 Historical contexts: sacredness, intent, and musical development in the church

In December 2011, I began conducting interviews with African American Pentecostal drummers from the Greater Toronto Area. Although 'gospel drumming,' much like Gospel Music, is a broad term that encompasses multiple styles, church denominations and communities, for interviewee Tara (pseudonym), a gospel drummer is someone "who plays (drums) in church...a Black church, though...the word Black, to be honest, is what I kind of expect." Chris (pseudonym) believes it is possible to hear differences in the drumming between denominations in Toronto—that "when you think of the word Baptist, the first thing that comes to mind is more quiet, not so heavy (on the) drums, more organ, more piano"—, but in





fig. 2 [32]



fig. 3 [33]

However, the problem is that gospel drumming patterns are transcribed and characterized as being predominately linear in their approach; linear fills that mostly punctuate the ONE during a hip-hop or R&B groove. Objectively, in notated form, gospel and linear techniques are treated as exactly the same, especially in online drumming forums and lesson websites, where linear patterns are referenced as a basis for understanding ‘gospel’ drumming. Throughout Internet discussion boards and drumming forums, ‘gospel’ *is* linear drumming, often represented as separations between the hands and feet (indicated by R[ight] and L[eft] hands and F[oot]/Kick drums): it’s “linear sextuplet fills...usually in a pretty simple sticking...just played at high speeds [...] RLRFR L RFFRLR FRLRFF RLRFR L [...] that is an example of what they call a “gospel lick” these days...really just linear sextuplets and fun as hell” [34]; it’s just ‘lots of linear overplaying,’ ‘just a linear fill’ [35]. Compounding the ambiguousness for defining a ‘gospel’ approach are the variety of genres that have been integrated into contemporary forms of Christian worship, extending the label of ‘gospel’ to signify a wide range of tastes and styles [36]. For interview participant, Cory (pseudonym): “If you really want to get down and nitty gritty, the [gospel] chops are the same chops you play in metal music...like, it’s exactly the same chops...there’s nothing different except for feel.” What tends to distinguish gospel drumming as a separate form of linear drumming is the importance of Blackness.

### 5.3 Legitimizing/mystifying blackness

Within the drumming market, certain aspects of ‘gospel’ have been rearticulated into ‘official’ and ‘authentic’ showcases for up and coming Black talent: the ‘Gospel Summit’ (Modern Drummer Festival, 2006) and the ‘Yamaha Groove Hour’ (Montreal Drum Fest, 2011), for example. Both of these events are structured around the ‘gospel shed,’ where a number of drummers (often in a church) perform a groove in unison and competitively ‘out-play’ one another with use of technical fills and patterns. However, the cultural capital that has become associated with this church drumming practice often rearticulates the ‘shed’ to signify authentic Blackness. This is particularly the case for the GospelChops.com ‘Shed Sessionz’ DVDs (especially Vol. 2) [37] and Aaron Spears’ ‘Beyond the Chops’ DVD (Hudson Music), which featured bonus ‘archival footage’ of him performing in church and in various drum sheds, ‘shedding, teaching, and learning.’ Also included in Spears’ instructional DVD was an interview component with professional drummer Jojo Mayer, delving into Spears’ church background—his early influences, ‘culturally speaking’ [38]. In

the ‘Shed Sessionz’ Vol. 2 DVD, African American drummers ‘battle’ each other in a competitive setting within the 2/4 Gospel Shout context. However, Tara felt that when White drummers appear in these Shed videos, “it’s like they’re trying not to (make it seem like it’s an all-Black gospel thing).” Tara’s concern articulates one of the inherent tensions within the discourse of gospel drumming: Black church drummers are the most recognized and marketed gospel players in mainstream drumming videos and advertisements; many Black church drummers identify ‘gospel’ as being something that is distinctly Black—highlighting how, for both Tara and interview participant Cory (pseudonym), there is a certain degree of negativity towards non-Black drummers within the African American church community: “You could have a Black guy, you could have a White guy playing for a choir; the White guy could be just killing it, but you’ll see Black people will gravitate towards the Black person and not give the White guy his credit” (Cory). However, both of these outlooks conflict with the predominantly ‘objective’ intent that is offered through professional skills development. The appropriation of various drumming techniques from a variety of ‘cultural’ resources would be completely acceptable, as the logic of this ideology dictates quite simply that objectively, ‘good drumming is good drumming,’ regardless of ethnic, cultural, or racial factors. The ‘Shout Shed’ in ‘Shed Sessionz Vol. 2,’ however, interpellates viewers to understand gospel drumming as being distinctly and religiously Black, ‘cueing’ race as a factor [39]. Gospel drumming is coded with implicit ‘racial appeals’ to consumers. Racial appeals effectively ‘cue’ race to identify a kind of racialized communication that will provide an idea about what we should think about when we are exposed to it, as well as ways to interpret it [39; pg. 14]. These messages do not necessarily mean that they are indeed racist, but the structure of the implicit racial appeal interpellates consumers to ‘think racially’; the leap towards essentialist and even racist understandings of gospel drumming is therefore not so difficult from this initial vantage point. Furthermore, race-based persuasive appeals are more effective when they are constructed implicitly and when the underlying racial message remains hidden from public view [39; pg. 2].

Following the success of the ‘Beyond the Chops’ DVD, Hudson Music quickly released another video entitled ‘Ultimate Drum Lessons: Gospel and R&B Drumming’ (2011), a compilation of previously released Hudson Music material that incorporated many drummers into the gospel discourse. However, a few of the drummers featured in the DVD have never been identified as being explicitly gospel before, even though their clips from previously released instructional DVDs were used; the ‘R&B’ distinction from ‘Gospel’ also obscures how many church drummers play also R&B, or that many R&B drummers do not play gospel music. For instance, John Blackwell, Jr., mostly known as the drummer for Prince, has slowly become labeled predominately as a ‘gospel drummer’ in recent years. Clips from his 2003 Hudson Music DVD, ‘John Blackwell: Technique, Grooving, and Showmanship’ appeared in the ‘Ultimate Drum Lessons’ gospel DVD. Although Blackwell, Jr. is an African American who grew up in a Baptist Church, his identification with gospel drumming, specifically, has become more prominent after his ‘Technique’ (2003) and ‘Hudson Music Master Series’ (2008) DVDs. He is mostly noted for having long-standing roots in funk, fusion, and R&B playing, and has considerable

experience in the drum corps, informing much of his characteristic showmanship qualities (stick twirling, etc.). But, for some of the interviewees, his inclusion in the ‘Ultimate’ DVD represents a bit of a stretch for the gospel style, even pointing to distrust in the portrayal of gospel by the producers of these DVDs. For Tara, “he [Blackwell] doesn’t feel church to me...it’s not fair, and if you’re not Black, you don’t get that label.”

For each of the interview participants, ‘gospel’ has been a label that has been placed upon them in a negative light, a moniker that essentializes all forms of complex Black drumming. For these participants, talented and advanced Black drummers—some who are “nowhere near Christ” (Cory)—are often quickly labeled ‘gospel,’ indicating that the understanding of the style is more equated with a generalized Blackness. In this sense, the concrete practices and developments characteristic to the Pentecostal church are mystified and *depoliticized*. Interestingly, even though each of them perform in Black churches and play with gospel artists and choirs, none of the interviewees identify themselves as gospel drummers. Instead, they wish to highlight their overall musicianship and ability to play within many genres and styles. For Cory, “the assumption is by certain people that don’t know me because I’m Black, is that you know, I play hip hop, gospel and jazz, that sort of thing, where meanwhile, I have a very deep rooted background in rock, also...it was a White guy that taught me to groove the way I groove. It wasn’t Black gospel, it wasn’t a Black person...it was nothing like that.”

## 6. CONCLUSION:

Black Pentecostalism is already signified as *the* distinct cultural referent in gospel drumming texts, and it should come to no surprise that religiosity and racial identification perform an integral role in the lives of these church drummers. Although racialized communities may ‘yearn to be free’ of race and racism through ‘planetary humanism’ or ‘strategic universalism’ [40; pg. xv], it is also understandable that the codes of race may continue to operate as signifiers of distinction for historically subordinated, non-White communities. The culturalization of Blackness and Black religiosity in gospel drumming allows for the racial signifier to operate unmentioned; the racial discourses surrounding gospel drumming point to how discussions of cultural distinction can quite easily ‘turn racial.’ However, this issue articulates the dialectical tension in discussing culture within a ‘post-racial’ world. If Black drummers are implied as having innate talent—skills, which are mystified from their distinct religious beliefs and musical practices—, gospel drumming risks to perpetuate race as a legitimate factor in the cultivation and study of these techniques and skills. Within ‘neutral’ space, the visual difference of skin color attached to exceptional musical skill can generate the racialized ‘will to know.’ It is from this vantage point where Black ‘church-ness’ (the Lacanian *petit objet a*) resides as that inaccessible ‘thing’ about Black hip hop, R&B, and soul drumming (*it’s all gospel*).

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