

Jookin). As an art form reflecting multiple influences, including African American expressive culture and street culture in 1990s Los Angeles, krumping could be analyzed within any number of informative contexts: as an African American dance form, as an art form that transforms violence into a communal public art form, as a form of street culture exploited by the music industry, and as a creative transformation of the hardships of urban life. The film raises many questions and provides few answers, leaving it open to a variety of interpretations.

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Like the multiple faces extending in all directions from Jimi Hendrix’s gaze on the album cover of *Axis: Bold As Love*, this collection of essays reveals a dizzying array of new perspectives on the black experience of rock. Without dismissing the early inventors of rock and roll (the

book's title, after all, comes from a Little Richard song), *Rip It Up*'s contributors turn the turntables on what has become the dominant rock narrative of black "ancestors" followed by white "artists." Instead, in a series of analytic inquiries, personal essays, interviews, and historically significant articles, the rock critic Kandia Crazy Horse has assembled flashes of an alternate history—one that hesitantly confronts, but ultimately revises, the ways in which we think about race and rock.

Crazy Horse, who writes for the *Village Voice* among other publications, sees *Rip It Up* as an attempt to document the black presence in rock and roll even if the contributors cannot quite arrive at any definitive summary of black rock's contours and significance. "Even if I and my collaborators have not arrived at satisfactory responses to 'What is black rock?' or 'Is rock race-neutral or constantly plagued by mummery and racial subjectivity?' or, as the immortal Funkadelic Mob best put it, 'Who Says a Funk Band Can't Play Rock?!' *Rip It Up* digs into the essence of black Americana to praise rock's pioneering heroes and latter-day road warriors" (xviii). The book is indeed full of praise, but it is more than merely celebratory. Crazy Horse and her colleagues raise new possibilities for thinking about topics such as musical genre, racial identity, celebrity culture, audience reception, postcolonial perspective, and the history of popular music itself.

What the book achieves most successfully is a revision of the dominant narrative of rock history, which has become a racialized origin story of black blues, rhythm and blues, and soul that led to white innovations in rock. In place of this much-told tale, in which Robert Johnson, Bessie Smith, Louis Jordan, Little Richard, Chuck Berry, and others begot the Beatles, Stones, Dylan, Joplin, Zeppelin, and onward to white punk and black rap, *Rip It Up* chronicles the continued tale of African American artists experimenting with the musical form of rock in 1960s soul and psychedelia, 1970s funk and punk, and 1980s and 1990s heavy metal and hip hop. Although its format of essays and interviews falls short of rendering a comprehensive revision and there is no overt statement or articulation of this revision, by emphasizing the breadth of the black rock experience, the book demonstrates how music history narratives can often elide the actual history of music into a smoothly flowing tale that does not acknowledge the multifaceted dimensions—the bumps in the funk, the rocks in the rolling path—of music's development. *Rip It Up* provides ample evidence that the various efforts by black rockers to remake rock, and in the process remake race, need to be investigated more closely.

Rip It Up chronicles a number of figures who will probably be familiar to most readers: Little Richard, Ike and Tina Turner, Jimi Hendrix, Sly Stone, Parliament-Funkadelic, Prince, Vernon Reid of Living Color and the Black Rock Coalition, Me'Shell NdegeOcello, and Lenny Kravitz. But the book's contributors also spotlight musicians often overlooked or heretofore unrecognized as black rockers: Arthur Lee, the great lead vocalist for the Los Angeles band Love; Betty Davis, briefly married to Miles Davis and a solo artist in the 1970s; Vendetta Fields, a backup vocalist for bands from the Ikettes to Humble Pie to Pink Floyd to the Rolling Stones; 1970s black rock critic and scenester Lorraine O'Grady; the Bad Brains, punk-Rasta progenitors of hardcore in Washington DC; rap-rockers such as Pharrell Williams of the Neptunes and N.E.R.D. and Mos Def's rock project Black Jack Johnson; the neo-soul group the Family Stand; and Saul Hudson, better known as Slash, the one-time Guns 'n' Roses guitarist who comes from a mixed-race background. Whether focused on established musicians or those less well known, the best essays and interviews in *Rip It Up* skillfully negotiate questions of aesthetics, economics, and cultural politics as they try to piece together the puzzle of black rock.

Race and rock: these are two moving targets of analysis that dance together throughout Kandia Crazy Horse's collection. One of the most refreshing aspects of *Rip It Up* is that it recognizes not only the fluidity of music making, but of race making. As suggested by the flap over Miller Beer's "Rock Heroes" advertising campaign in the summer of 2004, in which not one black musician appeared, rock music continues to be associated primarily with white Americans. But the boundaries between rock, R&B, soul, funk, punk, hip hop, jazz, show tunes, pop, and other genre labels have always been dynamic. As Amy Linden writes in her thoughtful essay on Me'Shell NdegeOcello's varied musical explorations, "some sort of description is clearly needed; you just can't have a section in the store that simply says Music (or can you?), but most of the labeling is a cheat." Genres overlap, diverge, rejoin, and above all, change, for many reasons: musicians create and originate new combinations of sounds; audiences mix and match their listening; and, of course, record companies and recording artists themselves seek to increase their market shares by crossing over from one genre to another.

Not only is musical genre always in motion, always mutating, but also the boundaries of race. In the post-World War II United States—which has seen black social and political movements that were complex

mixtures of those seeking racial integration and separatism, a colorblind society and nationalist agendas, a melting pot and multiculturalism, middle-class respectability and working-class solidarity—race has been made and remade repeatedly as a category of identity. Expanding our scope beyond the United States, in a world that has seen the aftereffects of decolonization, post-Fordist modes of production, and the spread of American-style consumerism, race and ethnicity have migrated, shifted, and changed as concepts as much as the people who have witnessed these transformations themselves have. As a number of the essays in *Rip It Up* suggest, music has often been a key entity through which racial identity has been negotiated, contested, inscribed, and, most intriguingly, at times upended.¹

The two meatiest essays in *Rip It Up*—by Paul Gilroy and Michael C. Ladd—are meditations on the consciousness awakened by, respectively, Jimi Hendrix and Parliament-Funkadelic. Both essays rethink black rock as an engagement with American identity in a larger international, even intergalactic, arena. The essays adeptly move between the experiences of individuals and the larger political contexts of the Cold War, hinting at the rich ways in which rock can figure in the field of postcolonial studies. Because it circulated the globe through the expanding channels of international US consumerism, yet articulated critiques and alternatives to the inequities and exploitation, racial and otherwise, of the system in which it arose, black rock provides a site of inquiry into the contradictions of American cultural imperialism. Gilroy pays close attention to Jimi Hendrix's own efforts to produce music that worked toward a solution to these contradictions. Ladd takes up the reception of black rock by reflecting on his own dizzying adolescent years spent as an African American listening to Parliament-Funkadelic at a boarding school in the mountains of India.

The language in Paul Gilroy's striking essay on Hendrix, "Bold as Love? Jimi's Afrocyberdelia and the Challenge of the Not-Yet," can be difficult, even obtuse at times, but his intervention in Hendrixology is crucial. Rather than trying, on the one hand, to place Hendrix in a lineage of blues artists as some scholars have done, or, on the other hand, exoticize him as a freak brother from another planet, Gilroy treats Hendrix's "own mythic projections" as serious fodder for thought. In particular, Gilroy turns his attention to how the black rocker refashioned "the poetics of world citizenship" through his "gypsy life."

Emphasizing how Hendrix, as a member of the US Army's 101st Airborne Division in the early 1960s, was "an ex-paratrooper who became a hippie in an act of profound and complete treason that would make him an enemy of power until this day," Gilroy emphasizes the "planetary rather than a cosmic consciousness" that Hendrix fashioned in songs such as "Third Stone From the Sun." Coming on the heels of a new "iconic immediacy" of the earth, which had been photographed from space for the first time in 1968 by the Apollo spacecraft, and in a social and political world occupied with the US war in Vietnam, Hendrix's music "derived straightforwardly from Jimi's repudiation of the belligerent geopolitical mission that young men like himself were then routinely being given by Uncle Sam." Glimpsing humanity's possibilities for "peace and love" on a global level beyond the boundaries of the nation-state, Hendrix's music "invited us taming the US military industrial complex in the subversive act of traveling by dragonfly rather than warplane or helicopter."

This sort of imaginative act, powered by the electronic energy that Hendrix harnessed in his innovative use of the electric guitar and recording studio techniques, helped foster what Hendrix at times called the "electric church." Gilroy fleshes out Hendrix's suggestive concept as a vision of a new, postmodern black public sphere, linked to older blues forms, but assembled "prosthethically" through electronic amplification to develop a "planetary" awareness of utopian alternatives to the predicaments of Cold War culture.

Like Gilroy's wild but exciting turn to the "planetary" dimensions of black rock's imaginative possibilities in the face of Cold War realities, Michael C. Ladd's marvelously adventurous biographical essay, "Hardcore Jollies in the Himalayas, Staring at the Cosmic Slop: The Mothership between Triple and Quadruple Consciousness," rethinks race and rock beyond the boundaries of the United States. Ladd returns to his adolescent experiences attending boarding school in India. As an African American grooving to P-Funk on his Walkman as he strolled through poor Indian villages, Ladd had to grapple with his feeling of being colonized within his own homeland, yet part of the colonizing forces of the United States on a global scale. "As a black American in a 'third world' country," Ladd writes, "I was sinking my teeth into the disenfranchised Indians around me." For Ladd, "simply by being American, despite the African and the hyphen, I was associated with American imperialism. No matter how many people I tried to convince of my African roots, my build alone

said well fed, well paid.” To cope with this disconcerting predicament, Ladd “used Funkadelic as my flight pattern for understanding the global dilemma I was experiencing.”

The assumption that guides Ladd’s essay is that Funkadelic was a rock as much as a funk band. This seems valid if one listens to Eddie Hazel’s guitar work on the album “Maggot Brain,” or if we, as editor Crazy Horse does, refer to the song, “Who Says a Funk Band Can’t Play Rock?!” At minimum, there was a funk-rock continuum that spoke to the entwinement of African American musical production in the structures and channels of a larger United States corporate recording business. As a teenage listener far away on the margins of this tangled relationship of exploitation and expansion, Ladd is ironically able to grasp the central problems that it raised.

Drawing upon Du Bois’s idea of “double consciousness” for black Americans within the United States, Ladd conceptualizes a “triple consciousness” developed by being an expatriate African American. This “triple consciousness” adds to double consciousness the irony of simultaneously experiencing one’s mark of Americanness *and* one’s solidarity with people of color around the decolonizing world. “I maintain that triple consciousness is the view the black American has of him- or herself in a neocolonial context,” Ladd insists. “One examines one’s self as an oppressed person of color who, in a ‘third world’ context, shares an imperialist position with whites in the United States.”

However, Parliament-Funkadelic’s social imaginary of being on the “Mothership” of galactic funk travel provides Ladd with a way to struggle against the postcolonial conundrums of race and US imperialism. Songs such as Funkadelic ringleader George Clinton’s “Music for My Mother” help Ladd to “understand your mother’s kitchen as directly connected to the Mothership.” “Quadruple consciousness,” as Ladd calls it, links roots to the future, conceives of space as a place one travels to grasp the larger “planetary consciousness” that Gilroy hears in Hendrix’s music. Ladd’s adolescence in the Himalayas, where the first hints of this “quadruple consciousness” flowed between his ears from a bit of Funkadelic-in-the-headphones, allows Ladd “the perspective to see how bizarre and mysterious America can be. Funkadelic does the same thing; they take you all the way out to show you home.”²

If Gilroy and Ladd voyage the galaxies with Hendrix and Funkadelic to tackle issues close to home, other essays in *Rip It Up* hue stories of particular figures no less stellar for not being interstellar.

Crazy Horse reprints Lester Bangs' famous "White Noise Supremacists" essay, which passionately critiques the punk flirtations with racism during the late 1970s. Darryl A. Jenifer and Sascha Jenkins examine the compelling performances and the presence of the Bad Brains, the African American punks who profoundly shaped the Washington DC hardcore scene. Barry Walters celebrates Prince's "black pop" innovations of the 1980s. Barney Hoskyns takes us on his noirish, hard-boiled, detective work seeking out an interview with the elusive Arthur Lee, who led the Los Angeles band Love at the dawn of the psychedelic-rock boom of the late 1960s. Vivien Goldman tells a similarly haunting tale of trying, without success, to contact the pioneering (think Grace Jones ten years earlier, and even more provocative) black rock diva Betty Davis. Harry Allen examines the history of Living Color and the Black Rock Coalition in an interview with guitarist Vernon Reid. Jon Caramanica takes us through the present fascination with rock by hip-hop stars such as Andre 3000 of Outkast, Pharrell Williams of the Neptune Brothers and N.E.R.D., and Mos Def, who has formed a rap-rock band called Black Jack Johnson.

The interviews that appear in *Rip It Up* offer another angle on the issues of race and rock. What are most fascinating about these interviews are the silences, awkward pauses, and short answers that belie deeper conflicts. These spots, which the interviewers and Crazy Horse wisely chose to leave in the text, reveal how the topic of black rock is not easy to discuss. Music is difficult to talk about, and so is race. In a book keen on celebrating the joys of black rockers, the interviews reveal the difficulties, the isolation, the perplexities, and the deeper pains of trying to fashion a space for black rock.

A number of interviewees, such as the backup singer Vendetta Fields, emphasize the uplift narratives of their careers in rock rather than focusing on any difficulties they encountered because of race. Fields's responses to Kandia Crazy Horse's inquiries about any problems she faced as an African American female in the rock scene of the 1960s and 1970s are often curt; to my ears, they sometimes doth protest too much that everything was fine. When musicians do try to explain their predicaments, they often, understandably, have difficulty articulating how their racial identities and their music collide. Listen to Lenny Kravitz, for instance, respond to Knox Robinson's question about "being conscious of being a black musician" who sings rock: "It's always a trip, bro, to be an African American. I mean I'm mixed, but you know I'm a, you know . . . and to

look out every night in front of 25 thousand people, and to see it's basically all white folks" (173). Kravitz's deeper struggles to negotiate his mixed-race identity and his marketing as a black rocker emerge in the "you knows" and silences of his interview. There is nothing wrong with reaching a place of inarticulateness here, but it points to all that is unresolved and uneasy about the relationship between rock and race.

Or listen to Slash (né Saul Hudson) awkwardly describe to Jessica Willis the way race affected his relationship to the Guns 'n' Roses lead singer Axl Rose, whose lyrics at times toyed with racism. "There would be moments where the depths of where I come from really . . . It's not something I walk around trying to express or trying to convey anything . . . But sometimes I felt sort of short-changed in that environment," Slash recalls. "I didn't want to try and be something I wasn't. But I was also in a situation where being alongside him, if he would say certain things, I'd feel very uncomfortable. There were songs that he wrote . . . he insisted upon conveying certain messages I didn't agree with" (197). Admitting that he has never before spoken about his African American heritage in depth, Slash later remarks about his band mates: "Every so often I do appreciate the fact that I have a little bit more texture, something in my soul point of view, than some of those other people. I guess colleagues or whatever" (201). Slash is able here to articulate his unease with the racism he experienced in a heavy metal band such as Guns 'n' Roses, but only after a number of stutters and pauses that, to me, signify the difficulty of discussing the topic.

The story of rock and race as a whole, if we pause to think about it along the contours of *Rip It Up*, contains more than just the pain of awkward phrases and silences. It contains the searing hush of desperation and death. So many of the pioneering black rockers seemed unable to sustain themselves in public: Sly Stone in hiding, Betty Davis unreachable, Jimi Hendrix dead, and Arthur Lee only recently back performing. Yet there is much that is hopeful in the pages of *Rip It Up*. The book is solidly within the emerging post-soul perspective of African Americans who came of age in the wake of the Civil Rights movement of the 1960s but before the full ascendancy of Hip-Hop Nation to the pop music throne in the 1990s. As explored at length by Mark Anthony Neal, who draws especially on the insights of Greg Tate, the post-soul aesthetic offers a freedom for African American artistic exploration outside of racial essentialisms while still recognizing and fostering the rich historical wellspring of black culture (Neal, *Soul*; Tate, *Flyboy*). Black rock is a concept whose

future possibilities and past achievements appear most boldly within this post-soul perspective.

Overall, it must be said that *Rip It Up* is less a full-blown study than a series of sparks that illuminate new pathways, lines of thinking, and modes of future research for the history of rock music. Along with two other essay collections—*R&B (Rhythm & Business): The Political Economy of Black Music*, edited by Norman Kelley (2002), and *Everything But the Burden: What White People Are Taking From Black Culture*, edited by Greg Tate (2003)—*Rip It Up* completes a trilogy of recent books that rethink rock and race in the aftermath of factors such as hip-hop, globalization, and continued corporate consolidation.

Taken together, these books indicate that we need to be careful about mapping racial categories precisely onto genres of music. It is handy, for instance to call soul, funk, and hip-hop black music while labeling rock, country, and pop white. But *Rip It Up* suggests we need to question this utility. The book hints at how we need to *rip up* our existing assumptions. Marketplace motivations and artistic pursuits both continually make and remake the relationship between racial identity and rock music, leading to new identities and affiliations, meanings and feelings, and connections and demarcations.

The story that *Rip It Up* begins to outline is, of course, full of failure: drug overdoses, demon-haunted heroes and heroines, economic exploitations, misogynistic tendencies, exclusionary tactics, and lots of love and theft. But, it is also full of possibilities. Most especially, the essays suggest that the experience of music (“Are you experienced?” Jimi Hendrix asked) can *shake, rattle, and roll* our worlds, *supergroovalistic-prosifunksticate* our souls, rip things up into a new consciousness that recognizes the deep humanity coursing through our many similarities and syncopations, shared rhythms, and vast variations. The music seems to have room for everybody, but the question remains: do we?

Notes

1. For a wonderful essay on the ways in which race is socially and culturally produced, see Thomas Holt. For additional essays on the relationship between race and music, see, among other books, Radano.

2. I wonder how Robin Kelley would interpret Gilroy’s and Ladd’s portrayals of Hendrix and Funkadelic as internationalists (or even intergalactic-nists?). Do these musicians fit into the larger African American political

trajectory of cultural nationalism as a diasporic movement, or are Hendrix and Funkadelic merely reacting to the failure of integration in the United States of the 1960s? See Kelley's review of Brian Ward's *Just My Soul Responding: Rhythm and Blues, Black Consciousness, and Race Relations* for more of Kelley's thinking on this matter (Kelley, "A Sole Response").

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Schloss, Joseph G. *Making Beats: The Art of Sample-Based Hip-Hop*. Middletown, CT: Wesleyan UP, 2004

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Joseph Schloss's *Making Beats: The Art of Sample-Based Hip-Hop*, the first ethnographic study of hip-hop production, embodies its subject. The very character of his prose mimics deejaying (DJ)/production techniques. Schloss cross-fades between quotations from his consultants and his own reflections; layers multiple voices and ideas into the mix; ruptures the flow of his prose to pointedly correct misconceptions about hip-hop production; and loops themes of agency, compositional intention, and aesthetic pleasure throughout the book. For hip-hop scholars, connoisseurs, and fans, however, the most valuable aspect of Schloss's study is his determined myth busting.