From Pejuta To Powwow: The Evolution Of American Indian Music

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From *Pejuta* to Powwow: The Evolution of American Indian Music

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A Thesis presented to the Graduate Faculty of The College of William & Mary in Candidacy for the Degree of Master of Arts

Anthropology

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ABSTRACT

In the current climate of American Indian culture in the United States, the impact of the internet on powwow music and the electronic sharing of music has superseded the more traditional sharing of music in Native cultures. Due to the unique history of American Indian cultures, Native music changed, or evolved, from medicinal uses, pejuta, to expressionism—a method in which to cope with and express the effect history has had on the American Indian people and a way in which to bond with one another in these shared experiences. The evolution of Native music is a traditional form of historical particularism as seen by Native people themselves, and the history of American Indians, ethnomusicology, and hip-hop prove that this is the natural trajectory of Native cultures in today’s America. This paper poses to explore the movement of American Indian music from a sacred, private medicinal use, to continue being used to heal, but in a more public and adapted domain.
TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Acknowledgements</td>
<td>ii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dedications</td>
<td>iii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>List of Figures</td>
<td>iv</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frances Densmore and Plains Indian Ethnomusicology</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ethnomusicological History and Concepts</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theory and Ethnology in Native American Musical Practices</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Critiques and the Changing Field of Ethnomusicology</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Powwow, Pan-Indianism, and Hip-Hop Music</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Modernizing music: Hip-Hop and Powwow-Step</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conclusion</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bibliography</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>List of Songs</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
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This M.A. is dedicated to my fuzzy puppy babies Daiquiri and Corona who sat by my side or in my lap through the entire writing of this thesis…
LIST OF FIGURES

1. Comments on YouTube for the video “A Tribe Called Red- Look At This.” 43

2. Comments on YouTube for the video “A Tribe Called Red - Electric Pow Wow Drum (Official Audio).” 44
Introduction

In August 2008, I left for a semester to study “abroad.” My destination: Lake Andes, South Dakota. Needless to say, it is not “abroad,” but, living with a Lakota family on the Yankton Sioux Reservation to partake in their everyday cultural activities and conduct archaeological surveys still carried the essence of any study abroad program. While residing on the Yankton Reservation, I noticed a strong presence of hip-hop music and culture. Those hip-hop musical elements were present in their music as well; artists such as “A Tribe Called Red” and “Supaman” are popular to listen to and, for mixing hip-hop instrumental beats with Native vocal singing. Since 2008, I have wondered why reservation residents and “urban Indians”\(^1\) closely identified specifically with hip-hop music rather than other modern musical genres. With my experience on the Yankton Reservation making a strong impression on me and having interest and skills in music, I decided that in this thesis, I will explore these questions and how traditional Native American music, in general, has evolved.

During those next few months, while I attended powwows\(^2\) in North Dakota and South Dakota, I noticed the same correlation between hip-hop music and seemingly traditional music. Later, in September 2013, while attending powwow in Virginia, the same idea was observed again, even with

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\(^1\)“Urban Indians” are defined as “Native Americans in the United States and Canadian First Nations peoples who live in urban areas” (NUIFC, 2018).

\(^2\) Powwow is a Narraganset word meaning “spiritual leader.” It is used as a common term for a meeting of American Indian groups where they dance, sing, sell goods, etc.
different tribes in a completely different geographical area. It seems that
traditional music and hip-hop music were commodified in the same way
across cultures and space. This paper poses to explore the movement of
American Indian music from a sacred, private medicinal use to continue being
used to heal, but in a more public and adapted domain. How are these songs
maintained and shared in modern times as opposed to when Native American
music was first being studied in 1884 by anthropologists, such as Frances
Densmore, Alice Fletcher, and Jesse Walker Fewkes (Browner 2009:1)?
Why is hip-hop music the leading musical genre to promote and spread that
which is typically seen as traditional tribal practices across geography and
cultures?

According to a leading contemporary anthropologist of American Indian
music, Dr. Tara Browner, the amount of research done in this field has
decreased, especially music of Native groups south of the U.S-Canadian
border3 (Browner 2009:1). The concept of fieldwork as the primary research
method is still central to ethnomusicologists' work (Browner 2009:1). The
decline of indigenous studies is partially due to the reluctant participation of
Natives themselves in research. In the past, anthropologists would travel to
Native homes and record their research as they witnessed it. Certain songs
would not be discussed because of the power it holds for the individual and/or
tribe it belongs to. Those difficulties still exist when researching the topic of
Native music, however, ever since the American Indian Movement and civil

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3 The use of the terms anthropologist and ethnomusicologist is used interchangeably in this paper.
rights movement of the 1970s, Natives have been wary of anthropologists and the thought of being “studied” or regarded as an “other” (Browner 2009:2).

In the current climate of American Indian culture in the United States, the impact of the internet on powwow music and the electronic sharing of music has superseded the more traditional sharing of music in Native cultures. The internet has made information and music immediately available everywhere, whereas more traditional means were shared within a community. By exploring the history of American Indian ethnomusicology and the historical particularism, cultural relativism, and commodification of Native music, I argue that Native music has naturally adapted to current times shifting from pejuta⁴, or medicine, to more of a political expression of the American Indian plight since the arrival of European immigrants to North America continuing to heal the American Indian spirit.

Franz Boas, the father of cultural anthropology and the theory of historical particularism and salvage anthropology, criticized the ethnocentrism of evolutionism (Robbins 2010). Writing this paper with the word “evolution” in the title seems like a contradiction to Boas’ particularism, however, in this case, I consider the term “evolution” to be a part of the historical uniqueness of Plains Indian music. The transformation of sacred Native music to the modernized popular American genre of hip-hop does seem like acculturation, and I am sure many would argue it is. However, what if this acculturation of

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⁴ Pejuta is the Lakota, Dakota, Nakota term used for medicine. I learned from a Dakota elder who teaches the Lakota, Dakota language that it is pronounced pay-zhu-tuh.
Native to hip-hop music is the natural progression of American Indian music? Due to the unique history of American Indian cultures, Native music changed, or evolved, from medicinal uses to expressionism—a method in which to cope with and express the effect history has had on the American Indian people and a way in which to bond with one another in these shared experiences. Therefore, the evolution of Native music is a traditional form of historical particularism as seen by Native people themselves, and the history of American Indians, ethnomusicology, and hip-hop prove that this is the natural trajectory of Native cultures in today’s America.

With the spread of European immigrants into the plains of the United States in the nineteenth century, Native communities gathered into complex political and social societies that crossed tribal lines. This was described by non-Natives as “Pan-Indian movements” (Cowger 2019). Powwows, a gathering of Native nations to celebrate their “Indianness,” spread across the Plains especially in the early twentieth century (Cowger 2019). “Crossing intertribal lines, powwows advanced pan-Indianism through song, dance, costumes, honoring ceremonies, giveaways, and prayers and speeches in Native languages and English” (Cowger 2019).

The spread of the Pan-Indian music genre has not completely erased the unique sounds of each taxonomic group of powwow music, which has been sustained for thousands of years. Today, Natives perpetuate the sounds and significance of their ancestors by continuing to create new music yet, at the same time, preserve some of the traditional musical elements.
One thing that has changed is the writing down of music ever since American Indian ethnologist, Frances Densmore, attempted to explain Native music in western cultural terms; although her approach to this topic was for preservation purposes more so than explanatory ones (Densmore 1915:187). Yet, amid the assimilation, technology, and the need for survival, younger Native Americans suggest that they see that their culture is beginning to thrive again. Today’s Native musicians still practice their art from a more cultural and spiritual perspective than other modern musicians. The anthropological study of American Indian music has indeed evolved over the last few decades since Densmore’s initial studies because younger Natives have many methods with which to share their music and culture with each other and the world.

I argue that American Indian music has evolved over the past 100 years; some traditional elements of Native music remain; however, contemporary songs have adapted to include western European cultural elements. This mirrors in American Indian cultures since the spread of western European people throughout the North American continent. However, Natives still struggle with maintaining their cultural identity in an

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5 The term “younger Natives” is being used to refer to American Indian’s currently in the 18-50 age bracket.

6 Throughout this paper, many terms will be used to refer to American Indians as a cultural/ethnic group within the United States. Today, there are over 500 federally recognized American Indian groups that all have specific cultural nuances and practices. When regarding current American Indian music, it is also commonly used as a “catch-all” for any traditional music created by American Indians. Due to the many terms that could be used and have been used in other research, this paper will use terms interchangeably to refer to all cultures Native to America prior to the Contact Period.
evolving world of technology that easily informs and incorporates other cultures into one "mixing pot." American Indian music differs from all other changing cultural elements simply that music was one area Natives could control and remember as the "Indian" was educated out of them. Musical knowledge, like language, is an aural and oral practice that could more easily be conveyed secretly, if need be, from one generation to the next. It is the surviving generations that later altered the original versions to a "modern" and popularized rendition; more for entertainment purposes rather than for spiritual and cultural uses.

However, this is not seen as true by American Indians in relation to all songs and cultural music. For many Native cultures, music was a form of medicine, a way to heal the spirit with sound. Yet over time, this pejuta was shared with others making the song lose its power and sacredness. The healing power of the song came not just from spirits or a higher power, but from the individual that performed it and the sacred way it was kept from public knowledge. In the innovative book, Black Elk Speaks by John G. Neihardt, Black Elk recounts a dream he had when he was sick at nine years old. From the age of nine to seventeen, the dream troubled Black Elk because he was given a great vision, yet could not do anything about it (Neihardt 2004:121). Black Elk is advised by a medicine man, Black Road, that he is supposed to “do his duty and perform [this] vision for the people on earth” (Neihardt 2004:123). The receiving of visions and songs and the need to perform them for the people exemplifies the power and healing of song and
dance amongst Natives. These sacred songs have mostly evolved from private, individual use to a worldwide use in powwow and in entertainment.

Frances Densmore and Plains Indian Ethnomusicology

Frances Densmore was a pioneer of sub-discipline ethnomusicology about fifty years before it was commonly established. Ethnomusicologists, such as Alan Merriam and Bruno Nettl, built the field of study using Densmore’s research as the framework. Densmore used her professional training in music and combined it with Indian ethnology creating a cultural look at music production and performance in a non-Western culture. This was a radical move from musicological studies, which were primarily focused on comparing Western compositions. The basis for ethnomusicology was rooted in salvage anthropology and cultural evolutionism and was the condition that anthropologists and ethnomusicologists conducted their research; changing little and slow-growing since then. Francis Densmore, along with Alice Fletcher and others, in their work on Plains Indian music, established the foundations of modern ethnomusicology. Using Lakota Indian music as a platform, I argue that there needs to be a re-evaluation of Densmore’s ethnomusicological research. By doing so, contemporary

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Numerous terms are used when referring to the American Indians of the Minnesota, South Dakota, North Dakota, and Nebraska territories. The word “Sioux,” according to Webster’s Dictionary, is short for the French-Canadian word Nadoüessioüak meaning “small rattle snake” and is known to the Natives as having a negative connotation. Therefore, this author will further restrain from using “Sioux” to refer to the American Indians living in the Great Plains area except where used in the cited sources. From experience, this author has come across other names used for Natives of the territories such as Dakota, Lakota, or Nakota, which refers to language dialects. For the purpose of this paper, the term Lakota will be used to indicate the culture area.
scholars can utilize the “salvaged” field notes and recordings to establish continuity between pre-reservation Lakota musical traditions and their present practices.

Frances Theresa Densmore was born on May 21, 1867, in Red Wing, Minnesota. Her first exposure to the music she would later study was the distant singing of the Lakota tribes she heard as a child coming from across the nearby river. From 1884 to 1887, she studied music at the Oberlin College Conservatory of Music. After leaving Oberlin, she taught piano in St. Paul, Minnesota until 1889, then moved to Boston for private lessons and to study with composers Carl Baerma and John Knowles Paine at Harvard University (Oberlin College Archives 2014:28). There is scant evidence on how Densmore felt about giving up her music career to proceed with the study of Indians. However, “in a letter to her protégé Charles Hofmann, she hinted that a ‘breakdown’ in her health in 1901 forced her to give up her own music and focus on Indians,” yet there is scant evidence of how she felt about this (Minnesota Public Radio 2014).

In 1893, at the World’s Fair in Chicago, Densmore heard Natives “sing, dance, and yell and was almost scared to death” (Hofmann 1968:2). However, she had previously read what Alice Fletcher was writing about Omaha music at the time (Hofmann 1968:2). Although she did not mention why she had such a reaction to the Native music at the World’s Fair, Fletcher’s work piqued Densmore’s curiosity and she immediately began further research in the subject of American Indian music. In 1907, Densmore
began a project of documenting Chippewa and Lakota tribes’ music and asked the Smithsonian Institution’s Bureau of American Ethnology for financial assistance. She was appointed as Collaborator and worked for the Institution for fifty years until the day she died. During her years of service to the Smithsonian, Densmore traveled throughout the country to Indian villages where she recorded on wax cylinders nearly 2,500 songs of the Sioux, Chippewa, and various other tribes whose culture was already threatened with disappearing. In all, she recorded the songs of about thirty Indian tribes (Oberlin College Archives 2014:28).

Wax cylinders were invented in 1877 by Thomas Edison who wanted a way to record telegraph messages (Library of Congress 2019c). They ended up becoming an invaluable resource used by ethnographers in preserving native music and languages. The ethnographers believed that by making the recordings on the wax cylinders, they were preserving aspects of cultures that were soon to disappear (Hall 2013). In some instances, they were correct that there are some Native languages that have died or are spoken by very few people. “An example of a recording in a language no longer spoken today is this lullaby in Konomihu, a language related to Shasta, sung by Ellen Brazill Grant in California in 1926” (Hall 2013).

The Library of Congress has an extensive wax cylinder collection, unfortunately, much of it is not available for public use due to cultural sensitivities and the sacred nature of the songs (Hall 2013). Many of the recordings that are available are those of Omaha Indian Music which were
recorded by Francis La Flesche, first professional American Indian ethnologist, and Alice Fletcher, La Flesche’s employer and colleague. La Flesche was the second son of Omaha chief Joseph La Flesche and was sent to mission schools when he was a teenager. He started as an interpreter and research assistant for James Owen Dorsey, then later became a copyist for the Bureau of Indian Affairs while working on two law degrees at night. Soon La Flesche transferred over to the Bureau of American Ethnology and it is there that he met Alice Fletcher who was his employer, then colleague then adopted son (Library of Congress 2019b). Together, La Flesche and Fletcher collected extensive information on the Omaha people, including songs on wax cylinders.

In the introduction to Densmore’s extensive monograph of field notes on Lakota music and culture in *Teton Sioux Music and Culture*, she mentions the details, methods, and perceived shortcomings of her work and interpretations. First, she acknowledges that the songs were recorded using a phonograph, and later transcriptions were made from those recordings. Unfortunately, the phonograph produced poor quality sound, making hard to completely understand the words or tones. The speed of the playback also had to be precisely the same as when recorded to truly transcribe the correct tonal note (Densmore 1992:5). Densmore was transcribing the tones the singer made with his voice using Western musical notations. This could sometimes be hard to translate the non-Western style of music into Western notation because of the different nuances of sound production. Also, the
drums and other background instruments were completely ignored, only focusing on the singer and his words.

Frances Densmore’s work is reliant on the help she received from colleagues and friends. Her first contact with the Chippewa occurred when Densmore and her sister took a trip to Ontario for pleasure. While there, they went blueberry picking with a Chippewa girl and met her family. A few years later she traveled back to Ontario and this time hired an interpreter. Her trip included meeting a local Chippewa village who let Densmore take their pictures, pose with their drums, and performed a ceremony and sang for their guest. The songs she recorded were often given as gifts as that was a common tradition amongst Native people. The practice of gift-giving permeates all aspects of American Indian culture; from receiving blessings from spirits to exuding love and trust. At another time, a Chippewa man had attended the Seabury Divinity School at Faribault, Minnesota. The dean of the school, Dr. A. A. Butler, knew of Densmore’s interest in Chippewa culture and introduced her to the Chippewa man. These experiences and connections are what aided in Densmore’s ability to gain access to Native villages and the trust of the Native people (Hofmann 1968:21-22).

Since Densmore was not well-versed in any native language, she had to rely on the translations of an interpreter when speaking and listening to interviews and songs. This was a cause for problems, as she says: “In few instances, material which appeared to be interesting has been discarded because the informant was found to be unreliable” (Densmore 1992:5).
Another language barrier was present in the lyrics of the songs themselves; “The words of certain songs are in a 'sacred (esoteric) language,' which disguises their meaning” (Densmore 1992:8). In short, Lakota songs were used for different reasons such as rituals, courtship, before a battle or hunt, to recite a dream, or, to cure the sick. It is the latter intention that is highly personal and private; therefore, keeping such information away from other people, especially visiting scholars. To give away a song is to give away its power making the song furthermore useless. However, Densmore was successful in receiving and recording a few personal healing songs from *wicasa wakan*8. She does not indicate why the men were willing to divulge such information, nor if they were ever compensated, but she does mention that the songs were received by the men through dreams and were successful in curing those they were meant to assist (Densmore 1992:244-245).

After Densmore recorded her songs and diligent notes regarding the cultural practices that coincide with the music, she returned to the Smithsonian to tabulate, or transcribe, the recordings and descriptions. Following the tabulations in her book, she provided in-depth musicological analyses. These examinations were meant to assist the observations she made. Densmore explains that “the purpose of the descriptive analysis following each song is to suggest a method of critically observing Indian

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8 The Lakota term for medicine man is *wicasa wakan*, which literally translates to “holy man.” However, there are some sources that switch the order of the Lakota words to *wakan wicasa*. Although the order of the words does not misconstrue the meaning of the term, I prefer to use the former version.
music” (Densmore 1992:9). Overall, she provided information that holistically elucidated the musical practices of the Lakota.

Another bias of Densmore’s work was in her choice of which singers to record. She plainly states that “an effort was made to employ only the best singers” (Densmore 1992:5). What she does not state is how and by whom the singers were ranked. The “best” singers were probably high-ranking men; whose dreams and songs were formerly successful in their purpose (i.e. curing a sick person). With such accomplishments, it would not be unlikely for the Lakota to choose who was to be recorded by the visiting scholar. As Densmore states, “the Indian has an appropriate song for whatever he does, yet the music is very characteristic of the man. You can gain no more meaning of his song by listening to it…than from the expression on his face” (Hofmann 1968:3). Only one person, according to Densmore, has been able to penetrate the mystery of Indian music—Alice Fletcher—and the key to the mystery is love (Hofmann 1968:3).

Alice Fletcher began her studies of American Indian life at Harvard University’s Peabody Museum. Early on, most of her anthropological lectures were based on library research and a small amount of archaeological fieldwork (Library of Congress 2019a). In 1880, at a Boston literary gathering, she met Francis La Flesche and the two began touring the East Coast to raise support for endangered people, the Poncas (Library of Congress 2019a). After this tour, she wanted to observe Indian culture directly, and, over the course of thirty years, she traveled to the villages of the Omaha,
Pawnee, Sioux, Arapaho, Cheyenne, Chippewa, Oto, Osage, Nez Perce, Ponca, and Winnebago (Library of Congress 2019a). Fletcher’s willingness to live amongst and participate in the lives of Natives made her a valuable resource as an intermediary between Natives and the United States government.

Fletcher supported the educational and economic programs that brought American Indians closer to the assimilation of mainstream white culture because she felt it was the American Indian’s only salvation (Library of Congress 2019a). It is probably this idea that made her believe that her work was salvage anthropology and collected as much information she could. Fletcher saw herself as an ethnologist but recognized the importance of songs in ceremonies. Although she is well-known for her work in Native music, she relied mostly on musicologist, John Comfort Fillmore, to comment on the music’s characteristics; both shared the same theories on the implicit harmonic nature of Native music (Library of Congress 2019a).

Quoted in the book, *The American Indians and Their Music*, Densmore proudly pronounces that “Music is closely intertwined with the life of every race. We understand the people better if we know their music, and we appreciate their music better if we understand the people themselves” (Densmore 1970:5). This statement indicates the reasons behind her research and provides the philosophy behind the development of ethnomusicology in the 1950s. In his dedication book to Densmore, titled *Frances Densmore and American Indian Music*, Charles Hofmann states that
Densmore’s studies began in 1893 and used previous scholars’ foundations on Indian musical culture (Hofmann 1968:v). The scholars he is referring to include James Mooney, whose greatest work is considered to be the 1896 book *The Ghost Dance Religion and the Sioux Outbreak of 1890*, was primarily an ethnologist of the Plains cultures and only mentioned music within the larger context on cultural and religious practices (Moses 2000) (American Anthropological Association 1922:209-211). In the book, Mooney lightly touched upon a theory of revitalization, which would later be expounded upon by other anthropologists (Moses 2000). Mooney’s work gave insight into the importance of music within the Native cultures. Unfortunately, his sympathetic views towards Native cultures and specifically the peyote practices led to him being barred from further research and visits on Indian reservations (Moses 2000).

Frances Densmore was one of the first to concentrate on music, and then provide the cultural practices as background information to the songs. This kind of approach was uncommon, therefore, making her the pioneer of ethnomusicology. Dr. Matthew W. Stirling, former Chief of the Bureau of American Ethnology, stated in Hofmann’s dedication book:

She [Densmore] was well aware of music’s great importance in Indian ceremonies; in fact, it was usually an essential factor…. Thus, she always attempted to fit her music studies into the general matrix of tribal ethnology. In the foreword of her study of Chippewa music, she says: ‘The study of Indian music is more than a collection of Indian songs. It includes a consideration of the vocal expression of a mental concept; therefore, incorrect repetitions of a song are as significant as correct repetitions. Into their value enters a human element—the personality of the singer.’ Because of this realization, her reports are really ethnological studies that emphasize music (Hofmann 1968:vii).
Stirling also notes that Densmore was a “pioneer in one of the most neglected fields of Indian ethnology….American anthropologists and musicologists will always be in her debt for the rescue work\(^9\) she accomplished during this critical time” (Hofmann 1968:viii). Although Densmore seemingly held good intentions for her research, it was performed under the theoretical basis of salvage anthropology.

Prior to the twentieth century, those who studied music have done so from a musicological perspective focusing on the sound, composition, and structure as compared to western music. Before the 1950s, ethnomusicology tended to be approached by scholars from either the musicological perspective, the study of music as a part of history and musical theory, or, the rare anthropological one where the researcher looks at music’s ethnic and cultural context. Musicology is the study of music structure and technique in Western music, whereas the anthropological approach examines music as a feature of a given culture. It was not until the 1950s that music studied within the context of anthropology became relevant. This is mostly due to the enduring monograph, *The Anthropology of Music*, by Alan P. Merriam. Merriam attempted to provide a theoretical framework for the study of music as human behavior, and by connecting musicology and anthropology to form a more comprehensive field of ethnomusicology (Merriam 1968:viii). What resulted was a multitude of works that explored the cultural significance of

\(^9\) Italics were added by this author to stress the theoretical basis for Densmore’s research
sound and how human behaviors are continually affected by the music they produce. To understand where within ethnomusicology Frances Densmore’s work lies, the history and concepts first need to be mentioned.

**Ethnomusicological History and Concepts**

In the late eighteenth century, scholars became aware of non-Western music’s importance to study. This awareness was mostly due to Jean Jacques Rousseau’s innovative 1768 book titled: *A Complete Dictionary of Music: Consisting of a Copious Explanation of All Words Necessary to a True Knowledge and Understanding of Music*. Three branches of non-Western music, oriental, folk, and “primitive,” were defined in this monograph. This brought forth an insurgence of study in oriental music particularly (Nettl 1956:26-27). However, it was not until the mid-twentieth century that ethnomusicology became a significant field of study; reasons notwithstanding. Also referred to as comparative musicology, ethnomusicology is the comparative study of all characteristics of non-Western music. Yet, Merriam argues that this definition lacks the emphasis of the how and why of ethnomusicology, which obscures the difference between this field and musicology (Merriam 1968:5). While ethnomusicology shares similar perspectives and techniques with musicology, the former tends to observe the past and the latter strictly focuses on the present and on the technical aspects of Western music (Cihodariu 2011:184). Ultimately, ethnomusicology examines not only non-Western music and its structure, but also the behavior that has gone into the production of sounds (Merriam 1968:7).
The aims and purposes of ethnomusicology, according to Merriam, can be categorized into four approaches: non-Western attitude towards music, “disappearance” of non-Western music, music as a form of communication, and studying music as inter-disciplinary. The first is the attitude that music of non-Western people is not given its due, or appreciated, and is, therefore, the responsibility of the scholar to protect it (Merriam 1968:8). Ethnocentrism is something to be conquered within the field of anthropology as well and is not new to those who have dedicated their lives and studies to that of the “other.” The notion of the “other” is predicated on the separation of “us versus them.” Ethnomusicology is known to conceptualize Western music as the more sophisticated and complex compared to the simplistic sounds of non-Western music. This comparison has prompted the ethnocentric views scholars have made, leading to the separation of musicology and musical anthropology. The people who lack the ideals commonly held by the majority are viewed as a separate human, a “primitive” being. Ethnomusicology is also tasked with explaining and maintaining the ideals of these “other” people.

Scholars consider these different types of music to be fast disappearing in current times, thus must be studied before it vanishes. This is the second aim of ethnomusicology, and, again, is a purpose held in common with anthropology. On the other hand, some scholars consider music to be the most durable element of a culture. It remains to be passed down the generations along with other oral traditions, often containing stories and histories of the past. This leads to the third aim of music that considers it a
form of communication practices. Many studies have been conducted on people’s use of song, whether by instrument or voice, to convey messages to one another (Merriam 1968:8-10). A famous example of such communication would be that of the African American slaves and their call and response singing that would pass along messages of plantation conditions, or to facilitate safe passage on the Underground Railroad.

The fourth most common purpose for ethnomusicology was the broadening of the subject by exploring a wider field for reflection by questioning the aims of ethnomusicologists (Merriam 1968:13). In other words, the combination of Western and non-Western music as data would offer more from which to study. This idea of creating an inter-disciplinary subject is the aim of scholarly work at present (Cihodariu 2011:185). It is also common amongst anthropologists and ethnomusicologists to include linguistic, religious, political, and other behaviors into their analysis of music within a culture. As it became more common to unite Western and non-Western music in studies, ethnomusicology was replaced with musical anthropology. Although the two terms are still used interchangeably, musical anthropology refers to the cultural and technical studies of music (Cihodariu 2011:184). The term encompasses the studies of musicology and ethnomusicology to create the field of musical anthropology and all of the music of the world.

Every society has a particular concept of music or sound. In Miriam Cihodariu’s article, “A Rough Guide to Musical Anthropology,” she labels
seven sections in which a certain concept is discussed, including language, politics, and religion. In Western and non-Western cultures, each concept can be traced within some aspect of that society’s music, though each concept varies in interpretation. Merriam outlined these concepts in his monograph as cultural distinctions of music versus non-music, interpretation of talent, the extent of participation, musical origin and the supernatural, and music as an “emotion-producer” (Merriam 1968:63-84).

Music is integrated into a society’s activities whether through practice or performance. How it differs between cultures is how people conceptually use and organize it. One group may not accept what another group characterizes as music; for example, the howling of a wolf. What a person considers as music is what makes it unique to that culture and shapes the sound (Merriam 1968:63). For the Algonquian, it was common to use rattles in their music to ward off bad spirits, while the Ojibwa tribe saw the drum as a reproduction of the human heartbeat that added to the sacredness of the song. Sounds are understood to mean different things to society and have origins in different concepts.

One concept important to most societies is the interpretation of talent (Merriam 1968:67). Some may view musical talent as an inherent ability, others as an inheritance from a family member, and, still others that see talent as a gift from a higher power. No matter how talent is interpreted there is still a distinction that some people hold a greater ability at creating music.
Traditionally in Lakota culture, the “talent” of singing was in the person’s
memory. Since there was no written record, music and singing was used as a way of recording history and passing it on to others. Some people inherit the gift of good memory, while others learn by rote from elders (Lavonis 2004:23).

Another common perception of music is the extent of participation. Whether a group or individual performance, it is a societal construct that determines the ideal number of performers (Merriam 1968:72). While the number of participants varies, certain cultures have stipulations on who can participate. In Lakota culture, somewhere between four and twelve men may sit at the drum and sing, although no specific number is valued more than another. In contrast, women are not allowed directly around the drum because it is a sacred object whose power would be in conflict with a woman’s power. Sometimes women are allowed to join in as a response to the main male singers call, but when she responds, it must be in a voice an octave higher than that of the male and she must do it from a position outside of the drum circle (Young Bear and Theisz 1994:53).

These regulations are in place to protect the sacredness of the songs, which are the property of the individual that dreamed it, or created it, as a prayer to a higher spirit. Music, more so than other forms of art, tends to be an “emotion-producer” (Merriam 1968:80). It can be emotional for the creator, the performer, and the listener. It is also the only art form that produces emotions without a visual stimulus. That statement by itself speaks volumes of the power sound has over human behavior. This concept of music evoking
emotion is becoming a large part of musical anthropologists’ research today. The question of emotion is also related to the big question: why do people make music (Merriam 1968:82)? There can be a different answer from each individual that is asked.

Another theme that recurs in ethnomusicology is how the origin of music and instruments are created with aid from the supernatural world (Merriam 1968:77). Lakota music is often received through dreams when they are in direct connection to a spirit. Conversely, wicasa wakan, or a holy man, may use a song to ask the spirits to heal a sick person or for some type of assistance. These ideas reflect the connection music has to the spirit world as well as using music as a form of communication not between people, but between the mortal and spirit realms.

The symbolism of lyrics and sound are sometimes harder to decipher than the histories of the music itself. Arnold Schering, a music historian, wrote a book on the interpretation of Beethoven’s works as literal representations of classic literature (Nettl 2005:303). In the book, Schering provides many examples of Beethoven’s music and how melodies and the use of certain instruments reflect the words within a given literary piece. Although this book is not a common analysis in the field of ethnomusicology, it supports the theory that Beethoven provided a musical interpretation of the written word; the music is substituted for spoken language and is symbolic of words.
These concepts of music contain the basic knowledge that an ethnomusicologist seeks and are evidence of the behavior people have towards their music. It is with these concepts, and others, that an understanding of music can be made and can give insight to social constructs within various cultures. Typically, these concepts are similar for both Western and non-Western music and sound.

**Theory and Ethnology in Native American Musical Practices**

Dr. Tara Browner, author of *Heartbeat of the People: Music and Dance of the Northern Powwow*, explicitly describes the methods and theoretical frameworks utilized by early ethnographers, including Frances Densmore, Alice Fletcher, and James Mooney. She makes a point to say, as I have earlier in this paper, that these researchers were crucial in establishing the ethnomusicological framework for future scholars. Browner argues that “Their writings, although often useful, constitute a mixed inheritance, part factual blessing, and part theoretical curse” (Browner 2002:4). Part of this “theoretical curse” is due to the fact that the people who were visiting villages and reservations and conducting the research were government employees, not academics, Densmore included. The field of ethnology, as a whole, favored Darwin’s evolution theory, with the exception of Franz Boas. Boas, the father of anthropology, conducted his work as salvage anthropology, or the collecting of information of a culture before it could become extinct or disappear. “This method of Boasian anthropology was most distinct when Boas himself was ardently gathering and recording information on Native
American cultures that were threatened to be ‘lost through assimilation to expanding Euro-American cultures’” (Robbins 2010). Through this scope, Native American people were viewed as a vanishing race (Browner 2002:4-5). Thus, the purpose of collecting and recording the music of these “vanishing people” was to salvage what information they had before all was lost. Since most of the early anthropological work was done by ethnographers and with limited technology, salvage work was a mostly descriptive product. Ethnographers would write about their observations and experiences, collect some relevant objects, and later in the nineteenth century, be able to take some photographs and wax cylinder recordings. Early ethnomusicology followed the same process, bound by the lack of technology. There was an overlap between the two disciplines, thus they were not necessarily differentiated until later in the twentieth century.

Native American musical research was also conducted under the basis of cultural evolution and remained a popular framework from 1850-1920 (Browner 2002:6). Alice Fletcher’s preference for cultural evolution theory was evidenced in her book, *Indian Story and Song from North America*, stating that Native American conditions demonstrate “the slow development of human society and its institutions…. As these songs are from a race practically without instruments….and human voice was the sole means of expression…. The art of poetry is here in its infancy” (Fletcher 1900:124,126). Densmore is also criticized for portraying and viewing Natives in a cultural evolutionary perspective, as she notes:
To believe this [Native musical proficiency above Europeans] would imply that they, who are far behind us in general development, have a musical proficiency far in advance of our own…. In these instances, it was an evidence of lack of musical development rather than a sign of a high degree of culture (Densmore 1915:187-197).

This idea of evolutionary superiority went unchallenged until the 1890s when Franz Boas introduced his theory of cultural relativism, which states “...civilization is not something absolute, but ... is relative, and ... our ideas and conceptions are true only so far as our civilization goes” (Boas 1887:589). According to Browner, Boas’ ideas did not make its way into ethnomusicological practice until his protégé, George Herzog, taught it to his students, including Alan Merriam and Bruno Nettl, who, then, brought ethnomusicology into mainstream studies (Browner 2002:7). Densmore only references Boas in her book on Sioux music in her preface regarding the Lakota language; otherwise, she does not mention his astounding work in the development of cultural relativism.

**Critiques and the Changing Field of Ethnomusicology**

In “Keeping the Faith: A Legacy of Native American Ethnography, Ethnohistory, and Psychology,” Regna Darnell sets out to trace the genealogy of Native American anthropological scholars. What she concludes is that the "history of anthropology has produced very few examinations of the intellectual, institutional, and social interactional networks of individual scholars" (Darnell 2006:13). Since Densmore’s research on music was not popular during this time, she collaborated with Alice Fletcher and a few others. Most of her references were regarding general Lakota cultural
practices, not musical practices, per se. This notion can be applied to the early ethnomusicologists, requiring the reappraisal of Densmore’s field notes and recordings. Although Densmore could put the songs into a context of practice, or ritualistic scenarios, she did not include historical background that could give further insight into why the music was originally produced.

Janaki Bakhle, an ethnomusicologist of classical music traditions in India, has also recognized the shortcomings of ethnomusicology in her field. She argues that the dominant paradigms in the field are derived from Western music and project present studies on theoretical pasts (Bakhle 2005:15). She also claims that “history, within an ethnomusicological domain, often appears as either background information, a theoretical gesture, or predominantly local, remaining relatively unconnected to larger historical events” (Bakhle 2005:16). Although Bakhle is referring to the field of Hindustani music, the fact remains that ethnomusicology in general needs to reevaluate the theoretical framework upon which it is built.

Dr. Tara Browner further argues that contemporary ethnomusicologists are the “direct intellectual descendants” of Densmore and Fletcher, but exercise differing methodology, field methods, and outlook (Browner 2009:2). Three examples of how research is conducted differently include: community-oriented with primary focus on service to Native people, intellectual property is an issue, and Native people themselves are more involved with the preservation and interpretation of their music (Browner 2009:2). What Browner does not mention is when these changes have taken place, or if they
are yet the standard with which Native ethnomusicologists perform their research. Nevertheless, a considerable problem in the ethnomusicological field is that there is a lack, a decline even, of Native American music researchers (Powers 1990:3). As William Powers argues, “there appears to be a burgeoning of Plains-style music and dance,” yet no one to discuss it (Powers 1990:3). He also says that there is a scarcity of research performed on American Indian music in general, and on Plains music in particular (Powers 1990:3). What changes need to be made to acquire more scholars to examine the field of Native American music? Is this shortage of researchers due to the old-fashioned theoretical work and older data composed by previous ethnologists? Although I cannot provide these answers, I can safely determine that the field of ethnomusicology needs to be reappraised and interpreted to incorporate the modern practices of Native music. Theoretical frameworks such as communalism, semiotics, commodification, and many others, can offer new insight to the past and present practices of music in American Indian societies.

Academics now definitively know that Native American cultures remain relevant and their music has been “salvaged.” I suggest that ethnomusicologists analyze more contemporary works to establish a continuity of Natives’ cultural music practices. Old research by earlier scholars like Densmore and Fletcher can be reinterpreted by utilizing different theoretical approaches. For example, academics can use cognitive theory to determine how the music is/was produced, agency theory can determine the
private and personalized songs of the *wicasa wakan*, and performance theory can look more closely at the significance of movement and song in a more specified context.

The study of ethnomusicology is less than one hundred years old and research in this field seems to be decreasing. The field should look towards scholars like Tara Browner and William Powers for new Native American ethnomusicological methods and ideas. However, Frances Densmore’s groundbreaking research should continue to be considered as the foundation from which we conduct our studies. Densmore’s research was not only prolific and pioneering but also illustrates the biases and techniques that should no longer remain in the record. Thankfully, the data can still be used as representations of past musical practices, but the interpretations need to be modernized and reconstructed. Plains Indian music, in general, should no longer use cultural evolution and salvage anthropological techniques to interpret music, but regard it as an evolving continuity of culture.


In Browner’s 2009 book, *Music of the First Nations*, she introduces the collection of nine case studies by describing the increasing difficulty of work in American Indian ethnomusicology due to the aversion to ethnomusicologists and copyright and ownership disputes since the 1970s. Ethnomusicologists have tried working with this by learning to cope with legal, ethical, and cultural issues. Differences in methodology, field methods and outlook have been
developed with the research being more community based and oriented with “service to Native peoples as a primary goal” (Browner 2009:2).

Despite the various political and economic practices of pre-contact American Indian societies, most practiced, and still do in some ways, communalism. Native villages would participate in the caring of children, the sharing of food, chores, hunting, gathering, and other daily activities. There was a common belief of reciprocity and gift-giving; the survival of the tribe depended on each individual. Communalism among all Native tribes is as strong as ever. The sharing of music is still protected by the young and elder Natives; however, sharing between each other is encouraged. Powwows are events specifically used to share music, dance, and traditions between Natives.

In Paula Conlon’s article, “Iglulik Inuit Drum-Dance Songs,” she explores how the traditional musical style of drum-dance songs continues to maintain the links with the past (Eisenbeil 2019). Traditionally, a male hunter would compose a drum-dance song in solitude and would repeat the song over and over until he had it memorized. When he would return home from hunting, he would then teach the song to his wife, who in turn would teach it to the other women in the village to be ready to perform it at public gatherings. Conlon describes the women’s role as “paramount” because she acted as the man’s memory (Conlon 2009:9).

Although the drum-dance song is personal to the composer, there is no sense of property as is exhibited in some other American Indian cultures. It
was not necessary to ask permission to sing another’s song; singers expressed that the communal aspect of the singing of another’s song and that acknowledging the original creator was sufficient (Conlon 2009:9). Although this practice was not shared amongst all tribes, it is a common theme in the sharing of music and dance at powwows today.

Furthermore, Conlon explains that competition amongst singers is another way to engage the community and foster more intense participation throughout the community (Eisenbeil 2019). Although the lyrics and tempo might not be similar to that of traditional music from hundreds of years before, the heart of the practice is still intact: sharing of culture and tradition through community participation. While there have been changes in the study of ethnomusicology from its beginnings in the 1880s to now, communalism amongst tribes and, now, amongst all Native cultures is a common thread that has endured in music and dance.

Similarly, in the article “Singing Indian Country,” author David W. Samuels considers the Native acculturation of country music. Despite country music oftentimes reflecting on the life of the white working-class, it has also exploited the “cowboys versus Indians” theme (Samuels 2009:141). Country music is not the only art form to display this theme as many movies, television shows, books, and comics could attest to it. One would think that after decades of being subverted in the “cowboys versus Indians” theme that they would not only not participate in it, but would publicly denounce it as an insult to Native cultures. This is not the case; in fact, Samuels postulates that
loving music exceeds beyond our cultural experience and that Native Americans should not be singled out for needing to resist a genre of music that the individual might enjoy listening to (Samuels 2009:143). Samuels also states that the anomaly of Indians enjoying country music is seen through “dominant historical ideologies about what a proper expression of Native identity should be” (Samuels 2009:143). Natives do not need to act as how others think they should. Their expression of their culture, identity, and history can be done in whatever manner or made the individual prefers. In modern America, American Indians are giving a voice to their experiences and issues in a contemporary format that has been acculturated, or forced upon them since European contact.

As a way to preserve and link to the past, contemporary Native musicians have recontextualized traditional music in modern settings through hip-hop and rap music. Present-day Native musicians continue to find ways to express themselves that honor the old ways while selectively utilizing musical influences from dominant white culture to help get their message across to a contemporary audience (Conlon 2009:18). Hip-hop and rap have become the vehicle used to convey American Indian music and culture to a wider audience and to reach other Natives in urban settings.

**Powwow, Pan-Indianism, and Hip-Hop Music**

Powwows gained momentum in the United States, and other countries like Germany and England, after World War II. Before then, especially in
1890 at Wounded Knee and the culmination of the Ghost Dance movement, American Indian gatherings were prohibited. Ghost Dance was a spiritual movement that took place in the Northern Plains. A prophet named Wovoka would travel to villages teaching others the dance that he was gifted in a dream. The dance was thought to begin the ushering in of a new, peaceful era of American Indian life, after succumbing to the perils of Euro-American advancement into the western half of the land. At Wounded Knee, South Dakota in December 1890, the Ghost Dance was seen as a precursor to violent acts by non-Natives which resulted in the massacre of the Native people. After that, it was no longer legal for American Indians to gather in groups to perform ceremonies, dances, and other religious events. After Wild West shows of the early twentieth century and World War II, the gathering of dancing Natives was not seen as dangerous anymore; it was just dancing with friends and celebrating one’s heritage (Young Bear and Thiesz 1994:xxix-xxx).

The origin of the Native American powwow is not associated with just one tribe, but many different Native American customs, causing it to spread quickly through all the tribes of North America. The editors of the book *Powwow*, Clyde Ellis, Luke Ellis Lassiter, and Gary H. Dunham, define powwow as follows:

> Indian people gather in one place or another to share their dances and songs, renew friendships, and reaffirm their shared experiences as members of a tribe, organization, family or community.... ‘Why do we dance?... Well, how many reasons you got? Sometimes it’s for ceremony. Sometimes it’s because I want to put on my getup and shake a leg. And sometimes it’s because I want to remember my
friends and family. And sometimes it's just because....’ [The] goal is to draw attention to some of the differences and similarities from community to community and group to group and to help point the way toward a more systematic and nuanced cross-cultural understanding of powwows (MacDonald 2007).

While today’s powwow is a place to dance and gather together, the origin of the powwow is said to be connected to the Narragansett’s August Meeting, the Pacific Northwest tribes’ potlatch, and even the Plains tribes’ Sun Dance. The elements of these gatherings have been pieced together to form the Pan-Indian custom of powwow. The Narragansett’s August Meeting was conducted to share food and trade with other bands (Ellis 2003:13-14). The word powwow is a Narragansett word meaning “spiritual leader” (Smith 2013). The earliest recordings of a powwow-like gathering were made while observing the Narragansett’s August Meeting. Yet, elements of the Pacific Northwest practice of potlatch are also evidenced in the powwow. Potlatch was conducted yearly as a feast and a way to trade and gift things to others.

Another facet seen in powwow is the general ideas behind the Plains tribes’ Sun Dance. Sun Dance is held once a year for ceremonial purposes, however, it is basically a large gathering where people dance (Ellis 2003:13-14). However, to those performing Sun Dance, it is a time for healing. For many tribes, the sun is seen as a prominent figure, or deity (Densmore 1992:84). The Sun Dance is a way to worship that deity by offering strength and the ability to endure pain and was the fulfillment of a vow made in a time of anxiety (Densmore 1992:86).
At powwow, many people do not partake in the dancing but rather come to listen to the music and to heal. Music is considered a healing element, not just to Native communities, but it is considered a form of healing in all societies. Non-Indians attend powwow to observe and enjoy the celebration of beautiful cultures.

A great symbol evidenced in many aspects of powwow is the circle. The circle, sometimes known as the medicine wheel, is symbolic of life itself, the Circle of Life. Yet the ultimate meaning of the circle varies from tribe to tribe and is secret to others, even secret between just an individual and the Creator (Oxendine 2014). The powwow itself takes place in a circular arena with the entrance facing east towards the rising sun, and with various drum groups sitting around the dance area. Placing the drum at the center of the dance ring marks the consecration of the area (Ellis 2005:137). Men then take their place around the drum and sometimes women encircle the men. The drum itself is circular and has many metaphysical meanings and is personified; its beat is the heartbeat of the powwow (Ellis 2005:137).

All of these various tribal components are evidenced in the practice of powwow across North America. On the other hand, it is argued by some scholars and Natives that the powwow originated in the Great Plains, specifically by the Southern Poncas who arranged social dances in the 1880s (PBS 2006). On the PBS website, it discusses the content of the documentary Indian Country Diaries, particularly the section on “Powwow Culture.” Below is their interpretation of the origin of the powwow:
They passed the event on to the Kaw, who in turn gave it to the Osage. It traveled up through the Great Plains until the Omaha tribe invented a new style of dance and dress called the "Omaha" or "Grass" Dance. In the 1920s, tribes started opening their pow wows [sic] to other tribes and even whites. They may have been trying to piggyback on the popularity of Wild West Shows of the late 1880s that often featured Indian social dancing (PBS 2006).

Although the origin of the powwow is contested, it is certain that it holds facets in almost all Native tribes. It also demonstrates how the powwow represents Native identity and its significance in the Pan-Indian concept.

Today, some traditional songs are maintained in an older form, but more commonly they are blended with contemporary elements. As author Beverly Diamond states in Native American Music in Eastern North America: Experiencing Music, Expressing Culture, “The discourses that surround these contemporary uses of tradition often reflect contested definitions of identity, and they articulate responses to colonialism or to other historical or contemporary social issues” (Diamond 2008:117). Music and dance do not necessarily reflect what is considered truly “traditional,” but it is a blend of the past and present to provide a holistic Native identity.

Around the 1930s, Virginia tribes, such as the Chickahominy and the Rappahannock, realized that their traditional dances and music were completely lost. As a collective effort, they came together and created new dances and songs that are labeled as traditional, borrowing the format and some elements from Plains cultures and powwows. They researched some known themes of the dances their ancestors held, as well as use modern
dances from surrounding tribes to produce a personal style of dance for their tribe. These dances and songs are still used in powwows today, and spectators assume that these “traditional” dances are pre-contact, when, in fact, they are not. It is instances like this that contribute to the Pan-Indianism demonstrated at powwow (Diamond 2008:120-121). In truth, powwow reinforces community ties, but also originated from the wild west shows of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. The aesthetic of the wild west shows is still evident in powwow and is even expected to look a certain way; it exemplifies the idea of the American Indian warrior.

Pan-Indianism can be both a positive and negative thing. The positive Pan-Indian characteristics of powwow is the sharing of Native identity and traditions, forming a distinct “Indian-ness,” or what it means to be Native American in the world today. So much was lost when contact with Europeans occurred and all Natives can commiserate on the outrageous actions taken against Native people throughout the centuries. Conversely, Pan-Indianism contributes to this idea of one identity rather than the over 500 different federally recognized and countless other non-federal recognized tribal identities that exist in the country. It is common during powwow to see feathered headdresses and hear the pounding rhythm of the group drum. Those features tend to be Mid-West Plains in nature yet can be seen in powwows across the United States. Eastern tribes have adopted these Plains style of dress and music for the sake of maintaining what is considered
“Native American” identity. The blend of eastern and western tribal identities overwhelms the small amount of individual cultural traditions (Cowger 2019).

The combining of traditional musical elements with modern ones does not result in purely traditional Native American music. Today, many Native American musical groups are hip-hop or rap performers. Hip-hop and rap are commonly heard on the reservations and hold no traditional Native aspects, such as rattles, drums, or the call-and-response singing.

What makes these genres of music Native is the content they sing about. The most common theme found in the lyrics is the struggle of the Native people. Their struggles do not reside solely in the past but continue in Natives’ day-to-day lives. Reservation life is fraught with poverty, gang activity, and the feeling of a need to assimilate, yet trying to maintain some sort of Native identity. These themes are evident in almost any modern Native song, no matter the genre. Native struggle is something that brings Native communities together and is expressed through their current music.

The passing of American Indian cultural practices varies from family to family no matter their economic status and location. It is a picking and choosing of what cultural practices each nuclear family participates in. Schools are recognized as being the most inhibitive of Native American practices. Ever since the introduction of boarding schools in the late 1800’s and up to now, most young Natives are not able to speak in their Native tongue or continue with their cultural practices. Due to assimilation, the culture is becoming more diluted whether from fear of practicing it, failure to
pass it down from generation to generation and because of its practical uses becoming obsolete in modern America. Technology and communication are as advanced as ever before which also makes certain cultural practices obsolete. For example, the use of song as medicine, war chants, and communication has ceased to be as important or necessary as it was prior to modern technology (Li 2012).

Many Native Americans today are in a “survivor/victim stage;” usually leaving them in a state of “picking up the pieces and holding on to what they have.” “It is more important to survive through the day rather than to try and carry on everything else.” Native American history is taught only from the arrival of contact and on; prior to that “there is no history.” In Patrick Wolfe’s article, “Settler colonialism and the elimination of the native,” he argues that there is a difference between settler colonialism and genocide; it is a distinction “between victims murdered for where they are and victims murdered for who they are.” “So far as Indigenous people are concerned, where they are is who they are….the primary motive for elimination is not race (or religion, ethnicity, grade of civilization, etc.) but access to territory” (Wolfe 2006:388). The settler colonialism impressed upon Natives affected their daily life and culture, thus Native communities are still healing from the destruction of some of their traditional ways. Author Thomas Biolsi even suggests the “deadly enemies” hypothesis which maintains that “the deadliest enemies of Indian tribes are the local non-Indians who live both in and around territory designated as Indian country” (Garelick 2003:1076). Yet, even with
assimilation, technology, and the need for survival, younger Native Americans believe that their culture is beginning to thrive again. Language schools and groups are becoming more common on reservations, older Natives are passing on their knowledge to the younger, and everyone is recognizing that it is a responsibility to keep the culture alive, whether it be through music, language, dance, storytelling, clothing, etc. (Li 2012).

Native American music has undergone many changes since contact with Europeans. It can be argued that most of it was lost and is no longer truly “traditional.” Even though the music can be labeled as Pan-Indian and are comprised of many different regional features, there remains a small shred of individual cultural characteristics. The studies conducted by ethnomusicologists have led to resurgence in preserving Native music to maintain its survival. Natives have put forth their own efforts to construct their tribal identity through music (Browner 2002:7-8).

Music is important to Native Americans because it is based on the religious practices of their ancestors. What began as ceremony, as a method in which to heal the sick, and as communication with the spirit world, music transformed into a symbol of identity in the “melting pot” of America. Music has survived in one way or another through all the cultural diffusion and assimilation. Natives have managed to perpetuate the sounds and significance of their ancestors by continuing to create new music and, simultaneously, preserving the old.
Modernizing music: Hip-Hop and Powwow-Step

Hip-hop is a music and cultural movement that gained widespread popularity in the 1980s and 1990s. It is the “backing music for rap, the musical style incorporating rhythmic and/or rhyming speech that became the movement’s most lasting and influential art form” (Light 2019). Hip-hop began as a break dancing and graffiti movement of young artists in the predominantly African American economically depressed boroughs of New York City. As Alan Light, author and historian of hip-hop music, said, “the beginnings of the dancing, rapping, and deejaying components of hip-hop were bound together by the shared environment in which these art forms evolved” (Light 2019). Although hip-hop music started as a movement of artistic expression by the economically disadvantaged, the commodification of hip-hop helped it grow in popularity worldwide. Its’ electronic drum beats and music sampling appealed to listeners of various backgrounds as well as manufacturing products like clothing, liquor, and electronics (Light 2019).

At the turn of the century and with the growth of the internet and social media, the entire music industry transformed. Rather than purchasing records, cassettes, and CDs, music came in the digital mp3 format. The digital format made it much easier for music piracy and stealing. Computer platforms such as Napster and Limewire allowed users, even those with very limited technological knowledge, to share and download music files with each other for free in the comfort of their own home at fast speeds. This was an issue for record companies because there was no way to police the copying
of music. Instead of relying on the opinions of record executives and whether their music would be heard, artists gained back the power of music distribution. All music is now easily accessible on YouTube, Pandora, and Spotify, musicians popular based on the number of listeners and video views. Promoting music is easier and cheaper and takes just a click of a button. Conversely, listeners are also able to easily access more diverse and obscure music by imputing search terms and having sites make suggestions for you based on your preferences, opening a multitude of musical songs and genres. The smartphone has also increased the accessibility of the internet which, in turn, has modernized music consumption making it available wherever you go. These changes have helped give both the listener and the artists more choice and power (Harrison 2014).

The internet and opened access to American Indian culture and music and is also connecting Natives living on the reservations and “urban Indians.” Early ethnomusicologists were generally the only non-Natives who heard some of the songs that were deemed allowable without the song losing its power. Now that the internet has allowed the public to listen it presents many questions with how non-Natives are able to do with the music. Can non-Natives sing the songs? Dance? Play it? Listen to it in private or public? Use the songs as music to commercials, tv, and movies? Where does the ownership of the song and the spirit of the song reside? Of course, the song remains the property of the musicians and the ones who created it, but the idea of private property was not originally an American Indian concept. It also
makes it an easy target for appropriation. One example is from 2004 when the hip-hop music group Outkast performed their hit song “Hey Ya” at the Grammy Award show. The group received shame and outcry for their appropriation of American Indian clothing and motifs in their live performance of the song. The line between what is appropriate and acceptable of non-Natives are blurred and hard to define now when all information is readily available at any moment. However, Natives are now entering the public domain with their musical interpretations and are influencing a current trend of an open view of American Indian cultures as opposed to the private and secretive musical practices, such as Sun Dance.

Within the past ten years, a new music genre has emerged: powwow-step; the term was coined by the music group A Tribe Called Red (Gentile 2013). Powwow-Step is a blend of hip-hop, reggae, and dub-step, with elements of the traditional dance music of Native American powwows (Shingler 2013). “All we really did was match up dance music with dance music,” said Ian Campeau, a member of A Tribe Called Red (Shingler 2013). At A Tribe Called Red’s show, screens set up on either side of stage rework stereotypical depictions of Native Americans in everything from silent films to cartoons. The group’s imagery, like its music, forces the audience to rethink the perception of what it means to be aboriginal (Shingler 2013). In the article “The next hot sound? Powwow step, aboriginal hip-hop” by Benjamin Shingler, he writes:

In the case of A Tribe Called Red, the group makes an effort to use powwow songs in a way that honors the roots of indigenous culture. “I
One of A Tribe Called Red’s popular songs on YouTube, titled “Electric Powwow Drum,” starts with a traditional Northern-style drum beat. After a few seconds of the drum, an electronic-sounding horn begins to play on the second beat then every other drum beat to puncture the steady rhythm. Shortly after the electronic horns introduction, another layer of sound is added, this time with Native bells, almost sounding like a chorus of jingle dresses dancing. Lastly, the vocals are introduced, also in Northern-style with high-octave male voices. If it were not for the electronic horn, the song would sound like something typically sung at powwow.

The reactions of people around the world to this song can be seen in the comments below YouTube videos. The comments section for “A Tribe
Called Red” videos seem to be commonly used as a “shout out” to other Natives and “hashtagging” their respective tribe. Each commenter seems to express their appreciation for the Native sounds overlaid by dance-inducing beats. Some discuss the captivating beat and how it makes them feel “so PUMPED TO FIGHT”\(^\text{10}\) \(\text{A Tribe Called Red 2012a}\). Another commenter mentioned that the song was “based on the war cry of the Cree Tribe” \(\text{A Tribe Called Red 2012a}\). After listening to the Northern Cree drum group perform the song “War Cry” at the 2008 Toronto Powwow and “Cree: War Song” by George Nicotine and Group, it is hard to compare the songs and definitively say whether “Electric Powwow Drum” is based on a Cree war cry. This is mostly due to many elements of a traditional Cree war cry being missed in the “Electric Powwow Drum.” There is no call and response between the drum leader and the group because only samples, or snippets of a larger song, are used. Another difference between the two songs besides the obvious sounds is the tempo of each song. “Electric Powwow Drum” is much slower than

\(^{10}\) All capitals used by original author.
“War Cry,” as well as the backing female vocals not present in the hip-hop song. With these traditional elements missing does this still make the electronic version an American Indian song, or is it just a hip-hop song sampling a few Native components?

When listening to Frances Densmore’s Songs of the Sioux recordings, “Wolf Song,” “You May Go on the Warpath,” and “Song of the Braves’ Dance,” they are performed by one man using a woodblock instrument rather than a drum; differing altogether from other traditional Northern-style powwow drum songs and the modern powwow/hip-hop songs. I can surmise that the one Native man that recorded for Densmore received permission from his tribe to record the songs since they would not be performed as they usually are by Sioux tribes; with a drum, and by a group of men, with females singing outside the circle as a backup to the response. In Densmore’s writings, she has even said that certain songs were sung in an “esoteric language, which disguises their meaning” (Densmore 1992:8). Therefore, the power and sacredness of the song would still remain with it when used as it was intended by the tribe.

Another popular Powwow-Step artist is “Supaman,” an Apsáalooke rapper and fancy dancer who was born in Seattle, Washington and grew up in Crow Agency, Montana (Telonidis 2011). He has been merging inner-city music with more local concerns for more than twenty years. In the article “Supaman: Rapping on The Reservation” by Taki Telonidis, Supaman stated: “Native Americans grasp that culture of hip-hop because of the struggle. Hip-
hop was talking about the ghetto life, poverty, crime, drugs, alcohol, teen pregnancy; all that crazy stuff that happens in the ghetto is similar to the reservation life. We can relate to that (Telonidis 2011).”

In one YouTube video of “Supaman’s” song, “Prayer Loop Song,” he is seen in a recording studio dressed in his fancy dance regalia. He starts with a beat on his small hand drum which is recorded and looped to repeat. He puts the drum down and picks up a Native flute that he plays and is recorded then looped, then he begins to beatbox and layered on top of the drum and flute. He sings three rounds of “way-ah-yay-yoh,” each round rising in scale. Lastly, “Supaman” turns to a turntable and begins to “scratch” the record as it is done in hip-hop songs. Other songs of his, such as “Why,” “Miracle,” “Somewhere,” and “This is for the one,” follow similar production; starting with a single instrument or lyric and building up to the main part of the song.

Both “A Tribe Called Red” and “Supaman” share the same views on being able to express Native issues through hip-hop, which, in turn, has brought the issues mainstream to a Native and non-Native audience. Before contact with Europeans, American Indians had their own ideas of music which were used for spiritual, story-telling, oral history, healing, and other means. But where these two artists differ is in the production of their music. While “A Tribe Called Red” tends to use more hip-hop related sounds, “Supaman” creates his own sounds with traditional instruments, but records them and loops them for a slight hip-hop quality. Both artists are changing the traditional Native music genre by blending Native and hip-hop musical elements, but are
achieving the same thing in a slightly different manner and are recognized as the creators of the Powwow-Step genre.

Conclusion

I still remember driving through the South Dakota landscape in 2008, with the radio switching songs between Notorious B.I.G and Black Lodge Singers. I did not realize then that having seemingly contrasting music on a mix CD is not uncommon in Native country. Since my stay on the Yankton Reservation, the popularity of hip-hop has flourished not just on the reservations, but across the country. Similarly, American Indian ethnomusicology continues to be a growing field of study. It began as salvage anthropology to collect all the data before it disappeared. However, as is said in Emma Li’s American Indian film documentary: “we’re still here” (Li 2012). Although Native communities are not similar to what they used to be before European contact it does not lessen their presence, practices, and beliefs. Native communities have grown, adapted, and reconfigured to the times naturally like other societies have over time; Native music included.

Alice Fletcher and Frances Densmore were ethnographers with an interest in the impact music had in traditional American Indian lives. They set out to record it in written word and on wax cylinders to collect as information to be preserved in the museums. Tribes would offer them songs and dances not out of preservation, but as gifts to be given to honored guests. Native communities are based on communalism and gift-giving. Although they have
gone through difficult times with the impact of European-Americans migrating further west, they were not speaking to ethnographers as if they thought they were to go extinct.

Current technology aids in the spread of music and culture to everyone around the globe. The need to salvage a culture is not a pressing matter as it was once thought to be. The wax cylinders and writings preserved by the government in archives still remain as a useful tool for interpreting the past, as it is with all history. However, what does that mean for the preservation of music and culture of today for posterity? Will mp3’s and digitally archived YouTube videos be sorted into microchips in a government archive, or will there be an eternal “digital cloud” to preserve the music and videos for future historians? The idea of how the preservation of powwow-step music will be saved for future research is an intriguing one.

Rather than salvaging the music and practices of American Indians, contemporary scholars, such as Tara Browner, are looking at how the music fits into the story of American Indian culture and history. Native music should not be viewed in a dated manner, but as a continuing and evolving subject in Native cultural studies. New challenges do face current researchers, one such challenge being the antipathy of Natives towards being studied as an “other.” Past scholars such as Densmore and Fletcher were able to show up in a Native community and would record their findings, however after the civil rights movements in the 1970s and increasing awareness of American Indian
sovereignty, many Native tribes and governments are wary of anthropological study (Browner 2009:2).

Moving forward in American Indian ethnomusicology and being able to recognize the similar motifs in older Native music and hip-hop will offer researchers a new look into the pejuta and healing that occurs when Natives express themselves through the newly formed music genre of powwow-step.

The internet and the immediate worldwide sharing of all information have led to the American Indian culture is readily available to everyone. It has also enabled a way to share amongst each other and keep a connection between Natives living on reservations and “urban Indians.” Rather than meeting once a year at powwow, the music continually brings Natives together as they listen on platforms such as YouTube and make comments on the music videos. But most importantly, the music continues to heal the Native communities as their music is made and consumed; the message of the lyrics, the heartbeat of the drum, and the use of Native languages all contribute to the pejuta.
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