

**2020-2021  
AMERICAN  
STUDIES  
STUDENT  
JOURNAL**

**AMS SEPC 2020-2021**

# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

With this journal, the American Studies Student Educational Policy Committee (SEPC) aims to highlight the incredible work of American Studies students. Our hope is that this journal not only highlights the work produced by the students, but demonstrates the interdisciplinary nature of American Studies and its relevancy to core questions Grinnell students and faculty confront within their research, classrooms, peer groups, and more. With these hopes in mind, we're excited to share the first edition of the American Studies Student Journal.

Thank you for your support.

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# Fixing the Game

## A Podcast by Keir Hichens

Field of dreams is a canonically American story- in more ways than one. The film evokes nostalgia for the American family farm, forgotten heroes, and one man's quest to bring baseball home to Iowa. It's also segregated by gender and race, actively avoiding fundamental parts of the American story. Five-part series hosted by Keir Hichens, written as a summer research project.

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### Spotify Link:

[https://open.spotify.com/show/2iIURxsEjzUW38vUYIqOPh?  
si=lq0k710\\_SF6JOUdfkEnOow](https://open.spotify.com/show/2iIURxsEjzUW38vUYIqOPh?si=lq0k710_SF6JOUdfkEnOow)



# Creative Works for Exam by Abby Frerick



## Buffalo Bill and QAnon Shaman at the Capital Insurrection

Like many of those who charged the capital on Jan 6th, Buffalo Bill spent years in the US military. He fought in the Civil War and in the imperial Indian Wars.

Also akin to the insurgents, Buffalo Bill adopted aspects from a culture he wasn't entirely a part of: cowboys. Most cowboys of his time were not white, yet within the confines of his Wild West show, the cowboy became a powerful white male symbol of American expansion. Considering Buffalo Bill's dedication to entertaining and earning money, I could imagine him today creating alt-right content for the internet with men like the QAnon Shaman, who also have a thing for flair.

## Sissieretta Jones at the Grammys.

As a highly successful, classically trained soprano, Jones performed in the most famous venues of the United States and dazzled Black and white audiences. Despite her acclaim, many often referred to her as "Black Patti", a nickname likening her to a white European opera star. This disregard for individual talent reminded me of the claims made by many musicians of color that the Grammys are problematic and dismissive towards non-white entertainers, despite their incredible influence in popular music. (<https://sissierettajones.com/>)



# What Can “Classical Music” Learn from American Music Before the Late 19th Century?

an essay by Claire Davis

\*Content Warning: Mentions Minstrelsy

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I recently read the second chapter, “The Sacralization of Culture,” from Lawrence Levine’s book, *Highbrow/Lowbrow: The Emergence of Cultural Hierarchy in America*. Levine covers a vast amount of information as he maps the division between “highbrow” and “lowbrow” culture which developed during the second half of the nineteenth century, including the classist, racist, gendered, and Austro-German nationalist foundations of modern conceptions of classical music laid by conductors, philanthropists, critics, and musicians. In this post, I want to focus on one characteristic of American music during the first half of the nineteenth century which struck me: its “eclecticism,” as Levine calls it, or its flexible approach to genres and performance. In the ongoing discussion and movement to make classical music entities—musicians, conductors, composers, venues, philanthropists, schools, and so on—meaningfully inclusive and representative, I offer these examples to demonstrate that classical music has not always existed as it does now and can be flexible and truly engaged in communities. Before the late nineteenth century, Americans perceived “classical music” within an interrelated network of musical styles.

For reference, Levine defines “popular” or “lowbrow” as deriving “great pleasure from [an activity]” while experiencing it “in the context of [one’s] normal everyday culture,” and he defines “elite” or “highbrow” as deriving “both pleasure and social confirmation” from an activity. Though I will be discussing examples of open-mindedness in early-nineteenth-century American music, it is important to highlight that open-mindedness in one aspect of society does not mean inclusivity or equality in others. A division in concert-going practices did exist between “upper and middle classes” and lower classes. Levine also neglects to explicitly address how race and gender intersected with performance practices and how people experienced music in the early nineteenth century. The examples in the chapter make it clear that the music industry was dominated and managed by white men. Finally, there were tensions among American nationalism, anti-foreign sentiment, and cultural deference to western Europe that already existed by the nineteenth century. Keeping all of this in mind, I believe that we can learn from positive aspects of historical practices—the openness to mixing different styles and art forms as well as the general attitude of sharing and expression rather than presentation—and choose what we may wish to apply to our current practices.

Levine’s discussion of the mid-nineteenth-century tours of the three most popular European artists—Viennese ballerina Fanny Elssler, Norwegian violinist Ole Bull, and Swedish soprano Jenny Lind—stood out to me in particular. Today, much of these artists’ programs would be considered classical music and associated with highbrow society. But in the early nineteenth century, genre and class lines in music were not strictly defined, and these three artists toured “without an aura of exclusiveness... They were welcomed and admired by people from all segments of the society and ‘owned’ by none.” Further, Elssler, Bull, and Lind treated their performances as a place to share music with the audience rather than as a place to authoritatively present to the audience. As was the norm, they had no issue mixing other styles with their “classical” music and dance: Bull played American songs such as “Yankee Doodle” along with classical solos; Lind mixed Swedish folk songs, American songs, and operatic arias; and Elssler danced classical ballet, English hornpipes, and Spanish folk dances. Essentially, early nineteenth-century artists interacted with their audiences the way most artists—but not many classical institutions—would today. Classical music was not treated as an innately different music.

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I also found it interesting how opera (mostly Italian and usually in the English translation) was presented on early-nineteenth-century American stages. It was common for opera companies to insert “popular airs of the day either as a supplement to, or as a replacement for, certain arias. (This was not unique to the United States... Such composers as Rossini would leave places in their operas for [additions or changes].” In addition to the flexibility of content and a range of musical styles, a typical performance featured a mix of art forms, such as comic plays, vaudevilles, strong men, jugglers, animal acts, and minstrelsy. (For discussions addressing minstrelsy, a widespread and racist entertainment form of the nineteenth century which stereotyped and repressed Black people, please see a recommended resources list at the end of this post.) Such variety and shared artistic “ownership” of the music would make for a fascinating concert, and it would be an interesting performance practice to implement in classical music today. I also believe that it would foster a greater sense of community engagement in classical music because it would broaden the possibilities for exciting collaboration as well as relevance of the ensembles and musical styles. It would humanize live classical music and bring it into the everyday.

Levine’s examples of cross-genre collaboration reminded me of a relatively recent episode of Classically Black Podcast hosted by Katie Brown and Dalanie Harris. In “Live at SphinxConnect 2021: What About the Quality? | Episode 118,” they addressed meaningful change, community engagement, and antiracism. As an example of how orchestras could affirm that Black people are part of classical music and share in its history, Brown suggested doing a pre-concert talk with Lizzo because she is a flutist. Building on that, it would also be very exciting for an orchestra and Lizzo to perform together.

Looking forward, by shifting how we think of genre and of classical music as a part of music as a whole, and by recognizing classical music as musical styles within a rich network of musical and community relationships, we can make classical music more meaningful, representative, and engaged. Classical styles and ensembles—with adaptability, collaboration, and an attitude of artistic exchange and innovation—can be shared and enjoyed as a part of everyday life.

## Sources

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## Recommended Resources

“#267 The Faces of Racism.” Backstory Radio. <https://www.backstoryradio.org/shows/the-faces-of-racism/>.

“#272 Burnt Corks & Cakewalks.” Backstory Radio.  
<https://www.backstoryradio.org/shows/burnt-corks-cakewalks/>.

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# MLK'S LEGACY IN THE SCHOOL SPACE

**BY: HALLELA HINTON-WILLIAMS**

Martin Luther King Jr.'s legacy is celebrated across the country every January. The intent behind the holiday is to reflect and celebrate King's life, legacy, and the influence he had in awakening a nation to the inequality and racism that existed in the mid-twentieth century and recognize racism's pervasiveness today. However, in practice, MLK Jr. Day is a three-day weekend for most workers, a day of "service" that involves light volunteer work for some, and overshared, sanitized quotes attributed to King shared on social media platforms. Despite the intention, these actions do not properly reflect the radical career and philosophy of King nor truly acknowledge the lessons he wanted his legacy to symbolize. Most complicit in this erasure of King's legacy are elementary, middle, and high schools. Within states, and even counties, there is no consistency in King's celebration, lesson plans, or even if students have the day off or not. Most commonly, school administrations utilize the holiday to offset the use of weather-inclement days, as teacher professional development, or to provide a short lesson on King and the Civil Rights Movement. I suggest that if schools want to properly celebrate and acknowledge King's legacy, they must adopt King's core lessons in nonviolence, dignified labor, and sense of shared humanity by incorporating restorative justice practices, providing comprehensive career education, and implementing a social-emotional learning (SEL) curriculum.

## Restorative Justice

King's commitment and advocacy for nonviolence is crucial to his philosophy, theology, and activism. In "Pilgrimage to Nonviolence," King writes, "...nonviolence became more than a method to which I gave intellectual assent; it became a commitment to a way of life."<sup>1</sup> In his political and personal life, King was committed to nonviolence. Further, in his speech, "The Summer of Our Discontent," King not only highlighted the crucial role of nonviolence in his philosophy, but also positioned nonviolence as critical to the progress of the Civil Rights Movement. He says, "Nonviolence is a powerful and just weapon. It is a weapon unique in history, that cuts without wounding and ennobles the man who wields it. It is a sword that heals. Both a practical and a moral answer to the Negro's cry for justice, nonviolent direct action proved it could win victories without losing wars..."<sup>2</sup> For King, nonviolence is the tool to demand equal justice and opportunity for Black Americans and the path to redeem the soul of America. In these speeches, as well as countless interviews, articles, and sermons, the lesson of nonviolence becomes clear as King's enduring legacy.

Yet, many schools in this country often are best described as violent towards their students, especially their most vulnerable, due to harmful school discipline policies. In the 2013-14 school year, 5.3% of public school students received an out-of-school suspension.<sup>3</sup> Disturbingly, these numbers increase significantly for students from vulnerable and marginalized groups. 13.7% of Black students, 17.6% of Black male students, 6.7% of American Indian/Alaskan Native students, 9.1% of AI/AN male students, and 4.5% of Hispanic students, 6.4% of Hispanic male students, received out-of-school suspension.<sup>4</sup> Once disciplined, these students become further disengaged from the school community and are 50% less likely to graduate.<sup>5</sup> Yet, many of these students are suspended for trivial infractions of school policy including, but not limited to, dress code violations, talking back to teachers, and absences from class. For a school to disrupt a student's education and create a hostile learning environment that punishes natural teenage behavior is to enact violence in those students' lives.



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For schools to celebrate or acknowledge King's life, but still retain these policies that introduce and perpetuate violence in students' lives is a direct affront to King's core values and lessons. If schools hope to truly represent King's life, they will restructure these policies and better support their most marginalized and underserved students. As an alternative, schools could turn towards restorative justice. Restorative justice, "focuses on repairing harm through inclusive processes that engage all stakeholders."<sup>6</sup> It focuses on healing and community and seeks to undo the cycle of violence by addressing, "the root causes of behavior issues" rather than ignoring the systematic failures of the school system. As well, the implementation of restorative justice requires the development of a trusting, safe school community which demands a restructuring of other violent policies and practices such as the presence of School Resource Officers (SROs) and the use of seclusion and restraint practices in special education classrooms<sup>7</sup>. Through these changes, restorative justice disrupts violence in the school and better reflects King's legacy.

### Career Education

Further, King was clear that the quest for dignified labor for all people was a priority in his ministry and activism. A few weeks before his death, King says to Memphis workers, "So often we overlook the work and the significance of those who are not in professional jobs, of those who are not in the so-called big jobs. But let me say to you tonight, that whenever you are engaged in work that serves humanity and is for the building of humanity, it has dignity, and it has worth"<sup>8</sup>. King imparted to these workers that their work, all work, contained dignity and the burden on the government was to create better opportunities for dignified labor. Even to middle school students, King weaved in his belief that dignified labor needs to be a priority. In 1967, he says to Philadelphia students that their life blueprints, "must have as a basic principle the determination to achieve excellence in your various fields of endeavor."<sup>9</sup> King makes it clear: all labor should be dignified, all labor should be respected, and all labor has worth.

For many, the road towards finding and demanding dignified labor is still ongoing, decades after King's death. However, schools can play a critical role to develop a workforce with a clear understanding of the worth of their work and equipped with the tools to demand respect for it by implementing a comprehensive career education program. For example, the CareerOne program in St. Cloud, MN works with high school students to provide work readiness training, financial literacy courses, hands-on work experience, academic support, as well as a stipend. Students that complete the eight-week program become proficient in professionalism, varied job skills, and an understanding of the value of their work and the worth which must be respected in the workplace.<sup>10</sup> Overall, they are prepared to enter a workforce, ready and able to find and demand dignified labor. If implemented into the school space, this program, distinct from under-supported vocational training programs or underutilized dual credit systems, will ensure every student can advocate for and find dignified work. In this way, schools can embody King's legacy through a program that implements a core lesson, dignified labor, from King's teachings and advocacy.

### SEL Curriculum

Finally, King consistently spoke on the necessity of a shared sense of humanity for every person, including themselves. Speaking to middle school students in Philadelphia, King says, "Number one in your life's blueprint should be a deep belief in your own dignity, your own worth, and your own somebodiness."<sup>11</sup> However, this sense of humanity not only extends to seeing the inherent humanity inside of yourself but also encourages a sense of brotherhood that spurs service and advocacy.

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To those same students, he says, “However young you are, you have a responsibility to seek to make your nation a better nation in which to love. You have a responsibility to seek to make life better for everybody. And so, you must be involved in the struggle for freedom and justice.”<sup>12</sup> King saw a shared sense of humanity as crucial for the life plan of students, a reflection of his belief of the necessity of this shared humanity for everyone. In fact, in her article “Martin Luther King, Jr., and the Long Social Gospel Movement,” Cook argues that the idea of shared humanity is a crucial element in King’s vision for the future, the beloved community. She highlights a quote from King, “Through our scientific genius we have made of this world a neighborhood; now through our moral and spiritual development we must make of it a brotherhood.”<sup>13</sup> For King, this brotherhood would bring about a global community in which love and justice reigned, all predicated on the sense of shared humanity held by every community member.

Yet, many in the world do not hold this sense of shared humanity. However, schools have the unique position of instilling values into their students at the most influential periods of their life. Through this role, this sense of shared humanity could easily be implemented into a school’s curriculum. In fact, an SEL curriculum functions in exactly this way. SEL is defined as, “the process through which all young people and adults acquire and apply the knowledge, skills, and attitudes to develop healthy identities, manage emotions and achieve personal and collective goals, feel and show empathy for others, establish and maintain supportive relationships, and make responsible and caring decisions.”<sup>14</sup> In other words, SEL prepares students to understand themselves in relation to others and encourage their shared sense of humanity. According to a 2017 report that evaluated current (14–19-year-olds) and recent (19–22 year-olds) students, 77% of current high school students and 75% of recent students from strong SEL schools say they would participate in full time military, national or public service for their community or country, compared to 62% of current students and 58% of recent students from weak SEL high schools.<sup>15</sup> Further, 89% of current high school students and 84% of recent students from strong SEL schools say students at their schools get along with each other well, compared to 46% of current student and 33% of recent students from weak SEL schools.<sup>17</sup> The report also found that an SEL curriculum impacts the academic achievement and personal development of disadvantaged students.<sup>16</sup> Through this data, it is clear that a well-implemented SEL curriculum fosters a sense of community and humanity for every student. If schools implement this curriculum, they will not only better integrate King’s legacy into the classroom, but better prepare them to be members of King’s beloved community. Through this work, King’s life can truly be seen and appreciated in the school space.

### Conclusion

Through the incorporation of restorative justice practices, providing comprehensive career education, and implementing an SEL curriculum, schools reflect King’s core values of nonviolence, dignified labor, and sense of shared humanity. Through these initiatives, King’s treatment in the school space transforms from short-lived and tangential to systematic guidance that supports and advocates for vulnerable students. In this way, King’s desire to “leave a committed life behind” will be better seen through strong school communities and fulfilled, knowledgeable students. While this deft integration of King’s legacy facilitates the development of a safer, tight-knit school community, King’s life and career encompassed several other key themes and lessons that might benefit a school. How best can we approach King’s assertion that Black Power is critical for a Black student’s self-affirmation through curriculum and the recruitment and retainment of Black teachers? In what ways do King’s three evils manifest themselves in student achievement and growth? What measurement tools are best suited to address these issues and create effective interventions and, eventually, policy? How might King’s organizing efforts within the SCLC and in collaboration with SNCC provide a guide for schools aiming to engage in community organizing? How can we take King’s major influence, the Black Church, and better integrate it into how students and/or teachers use its teachings to define their worldview? With these questions, King’s legacy provides a number of opportunities to enhance the school space and produce engaged, compassionate citizens.

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