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### Black People's Paradox With Paramore

If you happen to find your way lurking on Black Twitter, you might have stumbled upon an odd joke about the band Paramore. "Why do black people like Paramore?" It's not that exact question, there will be several tweets defending Paramore as "black people music" or other black people revealing that they like Paramore. Even though black Americans have drastically shaped music history in every genre, black Americans still have a concept of "black people music" and white people music. Paramore, one of the most popular pop-punk bands of the 2000s and 2010s with all white members, remains a favorite secret on several black Americans' playlist despite the band not fitting in modern black music.

Paramore is a punk rock/pop-rock band from Franklin, Tennessee formed in 2004. The current members are Hayley Williams, the lead vocalist and main face of the band, Taylor York, the guitarist, and Zac Farro. Williams is the only member of the band to be on all five albums. Paramore's main style has been described as alternative rock, pop punk, emo pop, and their latest album had a different sound by incorporating synth-pop and new wave elements. All members of Paramore are Christian and white. Their fandom base includes people from around the world, but mostly white teens and young adults. But one overt quality about their fandom is the amount of black people who keep their like for Paramore hidden due to historical lines that divide music.

For years, there has been a distinct line between black music and white music. Music is music, but there has been a collective knowledge about what is music black people listen to and

what white people listen to. According to Kovarik, “The term *black music* does have meaning because black music has a specific history, a rather complex history that has required (and indeed still requires) much study and thought to articulate, and a history that is still unfolding today” (Kovarik, 2018). Black music has a history tied to slavery and discrimination. Slaves used to sing in the fields and send messages through the lyrics to warn other slaves. After emancipation, the birth of blues arrived as black people coped with depression, racism, and poverty. Originating in New Orleans in the 1920s, jazz became a worldwide sensation and was played from Paris to the West Indies. In the 1940s and 1950s after the Great Migration, R&B emerged in the north creating the iconic sound known as Motown. In the late 1980s, hip-hop and rap emerged and “quickly became one of the premier forms of expression for the youngest members of the inner city black and Latino communities in New York...” (Rebollo-Gill & Moras, 2018, p. 210). Today, rap music is the top music genre replacing rock. Though black music has made its mark in American music, there were tons of hurdles for it to be widely accepted and respected.

The term “race records” emerged and created the division between what was music for white people and what was music for black people. Race records were advertised towards black people and were often in stores that catered to black people. They were also were “subsidiaries of larger, white-owned labels, or related entertainment companies, that exploited black artists” (Ackermann, 2019). Black artists were mainly behind the scenes writing or composing but receive little compensation. Bessie Smith, known as the “Empress of Blues,” Columbia millions of dollars, but she could not read and was never paid royalties” (Blakemore, 2019). Between the exploitation of black artists, discrimination, and lack of marketing, black music was forced into a box. “Race records” was the term to describe music by black people until its rebranding as rhythm and blues in the 1950s.

At the same time, rock and roll surfaced through the radio. Most would associate rock and roll with white people, such as Elvis Presley also known as the “King of Rock and Roll.” Musicians such as Chuck Berry and Little Richard were some of the founders of the genre. In an interview with Time Magazine, Little Richard said that “It started out as rhythm and blues...there wasn’t nobody playing it at the time but black people—myself, Fats Domino, Chuck Berry...” (DeCurtis, 2001). As rock and roll became more popular by the mainstream, or white people, record labels wanted to whitewash the genre. White artists also were and still are given more credit while record labels use incorporation to market white artists who sing in black-dominated or originated genres. “Incorporation often takes place through commodification, that is, incorporating an alternative or oppositional idea in a commodity, often using the idea to sell or advertise the product by presenting it as avant garde or different from the mass” (Butsch, 2018, p. 76). This incorporation has contributed to the rise of less known black stars and musicians in genres outside of R&B and rap. Still today, black people are behind the scenes of the music business, overlooked, and placed into a box because of their skin color. Due to years of incorporation of black music, there is been a distinct line of what is black and white music.

To tie this back to Paramore, there is a reason why their black fans can not express their liking of the band so easily. Even artists who are black receive scrutiny for not making the modern typical black music. Both artists and fans are judged on their skin color of what kind of music they should like or not. Rolling Stone reported about a music critic who said that Lizzo, a dark-skinned, body-positive black female musician, makes “music for white people, that she’s merely shuckin’ and jivin’ for an audience of *yas kween*-era white feminists.” Lizzo’s music crosses several music genres and has elements of pop, hip-hop, funk, and R&B. Lizzo a black musician who uses elements of black-originated music does not make black enough music, according to some people.

People who regularly listen to music outside of the traditional and stereotypical genres promoted towards black people will also face scrutiny.

Paramore doesn't fit the stereotypical black person's music taste. Most black people tend to listen to music made by black people. Genres like rap, hip-hop, and R&B are generally marketed and geared towards black audiences. Though there are artists who break the mold, such as The Weeknd and Frank Ocean, they are still in the hegemonic genre of music for black men. Ocean, in particular, is an "artist who refuses to remain in the confines of Black popular music culture" (p. 333). Both are black males shifting the R&B genre and are comfortably in that genre. Their fans can proudly announce their appreciation for the artists. Paramore, on the other hand, is a punk rock band with white members and lacks the typical "black music elements." They incorporate some elements of funk, but most young black people do not know much about funk whose peak was in the 1970s and 1980s. Paramore gained popularity in the late 2000s and 2010s, where rap and R&B were the most popular among black people. Societal and social pressure makes black Paramore fans' music choice seem odd so unorthodox keep it to themselves to avoid being shunned.

Thanks to online platforms, black Paramore fans can express their admiration for the band. Paramore's popularity peaked right around the rise of Twitter. Taylor Bryant spoke of her experience of waiting outside of a Paramore concert in her Nylon essay, where she and her roommate were asked if they weren't going into the concert venue by an employee. She said that "maybe his confusion came from the fact that neither of us has brightly colored hair or visible tattoos or an aesthetic similar to that of any members of Paramore or the band's legions of fans. Shoot, we weren't even wearing Vans. But while that question might have been posed because of our dissonant style choices, more than likely it was asked because we are black" (Bryant, 2018). It is not easy to be a fan of white music as a black person. But the internet gives people the

chance to make it easier. In June of 2018, a tweet that simply said, “Black people love Paramore” went viral. So viral that Hayley Williams replied with “Just made my pale ass’s day!” (Bryant, 2018). The environment that Twitter gives black fans is special because it allows black people to be who they are. They are able to also interact with other black people who feel alienated with their unsterotypical music tastes. It also gives them the chance to be noticed by their favorite musicians. “Twitter disrupts the expectation of parasociality between the famous person and the fan” (Marwick & Boyd, 2018, p. 532). As social media grows, black fans will be able to express their music tastes without judgment by both their peers and society.

It is also to note that the secret of black people liking rock music is a paradox. Black people created and shaped rock music. Black people regard it as “white people music.” Yet black people pride themselves at the fact that black people shaped every genre of music. Black music is only regarded as black music because after slavery, white people segregated the genres and made laws about where it can be sold. At the end of the day, there is not really a black music genre because every genre is influenced or made by black people. As Wesley Morris says in his article ‘The Year We Obsessed Over Identity,’ “I live knowing that whatever my blackness means to me can be at odds with what it means to certain white observers...” (Morris, 2018, p. 89).

To conclude, black people’s roots are in rock and any other genre of music. The intense, complex history of black music has placed modern black Americans in a box whether we realize it or not. Our music choices should not be defined by our race. Paramore is black people’s music not because of the genre or because of the color of the band members but because every genre is black. The band Paramore proves that music has no color and no one should be excluded or ridiculed for their music taste.

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