

George Lipsitz. 2007. *Footsteps in the Dark: The Hidden Histories of Popular Music*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

Reviewed by Mark Burford

On June 18, 2008, a judge on the Pretoria High Court ruled that South Africans of Chinese descent will be henceforth redefined as “black”—an umbrella term referring in South Africa to black Africans, South Asian Indians, and other groups that have been subject to ethnic discrimination—thereby extending to them the benefits of black economic empowerment legislation. The widely-publicized, much satirized, and, for many racially black South Africans, controversial judgment was a victory for Chinese–South African activists who argued that their constituency had been “discriminated against because they were being treated as whites,” which disqualified them from business opportunities reserved for legally black victims of apartheid (Canaves 2008).¹ Beyond attempts to achieve socioeconomic equity, however, the landmark court decision also pointed suggestively to other questions, among them the social constructedness of racial categories, the legacy of transnational migration, and the confluent and divergent histories of colonial exploitation experienced by seemingly disparate communities.

Somewhere George Lipsitz must have been smiling. What popular music can teach us about such issues is his subject in *Footsteps in the Dark: The Hidden Histories of Popular Music*, a book in which Lipsitz calls for “reading popular music as history and interpreting history through popular music” (xvi). Addressing a rich counterpoint of musical cultures and sociopolitical questions with the author’s characteristic candor, commitment, and acuity, *Footsteps in the Dark* is a volume few scholars other than Lipsitz would have been able, or willing, to write. The book, his eighth, provides further, more contemporary evidence to support arguments he has developed over the years. Central preoccupations of each of his previous books are prominent in his latest: history and memory in popular culture (Lipsitz 1990); working-class cultural politics (1994a); social movements combating inequality and injustice (1988); systems of privilege predicated on biologically-based hierarchies (1998); the local and global politics of places and the panethnic communities that inhabit them (1991, 1994b); and the disciplinary and methodological challenges of scholarship seeking to address these and related concerns (2001). *Footsteps in the Dark* adds to a corpus that has firmly established Lipsitz as one of the seminal and most widely influential scholars in the field and subfields of cultural studies.

Lipsitz was trained as a historian—his earliest activism and scholarship focused on labor and working-class issues—and popular music history has held prominent place in his work. Structurally, *Footsteps in the Dark* communicates Lipsitz's deep interest in popular music as a text that "can be read historically, dialogically, and symptomatically" (xi). In theory, each of the book's ten central chapters, six of which (chapters 3–8) are expanded or revised versions of writings published over the past decade, addresses a particular repertory and social phenomenon; in fact, the topic suggested by each chapter title is more a point of departure than a restrictive focus.

Chapter 1, "Pop Stars: The Hidden History of Digital Capitalism," assesses the manipulation of (primarily) female desire by "the music–television–Internet industry" through the production, distribution, and consumption of music by boy bands and the reality TV–created all-girl band Eden's Crush. In Chapter 2, "Crossing Over: The Hidden History of Diaspora," Lipsitz discusses the Fugees' 1996 album *The Score* to highlight longstanding interactions among and between members of the Caribbean, African, and Asian diasporas. The early-1990s explosion in popularity of the Mexican dance music banda, and in particular banda's emergence as a "register of the social dislocations" (57) and new economic and political realities faced by low-wage migrant workers in the United States, is addressed in the third chapter, "Banda: The Hidden History of Greater Mexico." Chapters 4 and 5 seek to highlight the importance of communal spaces where cultural expression occurs apart from "the conduits of commercial culture and foundation-supported expressions" (124), sites Guthrie Ramsey (2003) has fruitfully characterized as "community theaters." "Jazz: The Hidden History of Nationalist Multiculturalism," a critique of Ken Burns's nineteen-hour serial documentary *Jazz*, considers how the single-minded celebration of heroic individuals, American exceptionalism, and the triumph of modernity that mark *Jazz* and many jazz historical narratives overshadows the cultural hybridity, internationalism, and community-based traditions that have always informed the work of jazz musicians. The chapter that follows, "Weeds in a Vacant Lot: The Hidden History of Urban Renewal," looks at the activities and ideals of the experimental arts collective the Black Artists Group (BAG) and Ry Cooder's 2005 album *Chavez Ravine* to explore the legacy of communities in St. Louis and Los Angeles uprooted and dispersed by urban expansion. Chapter 6, "Merengue: The Hidden History of Dominican Migration," considers how merengue, a music that has for the past century been freighted with the notion of a pure, essential Dominicaness, documents the experience of migration, particularly to New York City, in the process expanding its manifestations and meanings in a manner that reveals the true heterogeneity of the Dominican Republic itself.

Lipsitz's seventh chapter, "The Hip Hop Hearings: The Hidden History of Deindustrialization," assesses, on the one hand, the early-1990s uproar that culminated in an inquiry, led by the Black Congressional Caucus, into the social threat posed by violent and misogynistic hip-hop lyrics; and, on the other, the ways in which hip-hop and rap, "as much as any institution in our society" (173), have functioned as "repositories of social memory," providing commentary on the very inner-city challenges to which hip-hop lyrics testify and from which such moral panics distract. Theorizing from, while seeking to push beyond the limitations of, Gayatri Spivak's frequently-invoked concept of strategic essentialism, in chapter 8, "Masquerades and Mixtures: The Hidden History of Passing," Lipsitz calls upon his notion of strategic *anti*-essentialism, "identifying with a group to which you do *not* belong" (204, emphasis in the original; see also Lipsitz 1994b). His focus here is the insight into a more effective, intercultural antiracist activism offered by musicians who are either mixed-race or "members of one aggrieved group [who] masquerade as members of another" (190), and who, by choice or accident of birth, identify with multiple groups at once. Documenting "the transnational history of salsa music" (213) and the ways in which Puerto Rican identity has been shaped by the island's status as a United States commonwealth, chapter 9, "Salsa: The Hidden History of Colonialism," traces the "relentless waves of transnational and interracial antagonisms, alliances, identifications, and affiliations" (236) created through the reverberations of Puerto Rican popular music in New York, Hawaii, Cuba, Colombia, and the Congo. On the surface, chapter 10, "Techno: The Hidden History of Automation," describes how "techno music emerged from the deindustrialization of Detroit and the deterritorialization of its neighborhoods" (242); black teenagers in Detroit, transformed from consumers to producers, appropriated the very computer technology enabling the factory shutdowns that devastated the city in order "to make a 'new' recombinant music assembled from fragments of their tape and vinyl music collections" (239). But Lipsitz also interprets the rise and international diffusion of techno's beat-driven aesthetics as reflective of an extensive, if hidden, "history of percussive time," of "the growing presence and even predominance of African understandings of time in popular music" (253). These brief summaries convey only the crux of the book's main chapters; they cannot do justice to the extensive ground covered in each. This review will, therefore, highlight *Footsteps in the Dark's* essential claims, which, I believe, also communicate some of Lipsitz's core beliefs as a scholar and political thinker.

Lipsitz's introduction opens with a metaphor: the ocean's waves, which crash with powerful and immediate force but "begin their journey thousands of miles out at sea." The currents hidden beneath the ocean, "the distance

between a wave's point of origin and its point of arrival," are a wave's "long fetch." In part, this metaphor serves as a methodological provocation for historians. *Footsteps in the Dark*, "a book about hidden histories and long fetches," can in some ways be read as an episodic essay on historiography and the *raison d'être* of the historian: "The purpose of studying history is to train ourselves to look for its fetch, to realize that things that appear suddenly in our lives have a past, and to appreciate that part of what things are is how they came to be" (vii–viii). The book's title comes from the 1977 Isley Brothers recording of the same name, a song that registers the anxieties, possibilities, and repercussions of the unseen and unknown in a foundering love relationship—and, Lipsitz argues, in the uncertain social climate of the late 1970s: the Isleys' "Footsteps in the Dark" and other late-1970s forms of African American popular culture "serve as one of the few repositories of the memory of this period of rupture" (x). A keynote for the ensuing chapters, Lipsitz's reading of the song, in which he hears "changes caused by history but only rarely connected to recognized historical narratives" (xi), is intended to elucidate "the truths hidden by surface appearances in popular music" (xviii).

In *Footsteps in the Dark*, popular music—more specifically, "forms of popular music that became popular during the 1990s and early 2000s" (xv)—is the playing field on which these truths, communicated through four primary themes, are repeatedly addressed. One of these is the systemic injustice and inequality perpetuated by those who control powerful and largely unaccountable socioeconomic forces that include U.S. domestic and foreign policy, transnational free market economies, multinational corporations, and elite self-interest. The displacement and subsequent migration often precipitated by such agents, a second theme, has resulted in a decreasing significance of the nation-state and a growth in importance of transnational structures. More specific to musical expression is a third theme: the hybridity of identities and cultural forms that emerges (or is revealed) from the intersection of individuals and communities through the process of migration. For nearly two decades, Lipsitz has written about the "collective past that escapes notice in more conventional accounts" (1991:1). Accordingly, *Footsteps in the Dark* relentlessly argues that each of the abovementioned phenomena—systemic injustice, dislocation, and hybridity, one stemming in turn from the other—has a "hidden history" that is archived in popular music. Indeed, the book's fourth thematic strand may be its primary message: the importance of history and memory and the moral imperative "to access the parts of the past that are unwritten" (265); "historical changes that are only remotely registered in history books, newspapers, or the pronouncements of politicians can appear in vivid relief

and full complexity within products of the popular music industry—if we learn to read them correctly” (xv).

Lipsitz’s chapter on the Fugees is illustrative of how these four themes come into play in his discussion of the music. The acclaimed hip-hop band consists of the Haitian-born and Brooklyn-raised Wyclef Jean and Pras Michel, and Lauryn Hill, whom the two Haitians met when they moved to northern New Jersey as teenagers. Jean’s and Michel’s presence in the US attests to the massive migration of Haitians to Miami and New York stimulated by the repressive Duvalier regimes, the chaos surrounding the election and US-orchestrated ousters of President Jean-Bertrand Aristide, and destabilizing international economic policies. The Fugees’ multiplatinum-selling second album, *The Score*, in some ways renewed the cleverly eclectic spirit of late-1980s crossover hip-hop projects like De La Soul’s *3 Feet High and Rising* (1989). *The Score* was just as important for what it represented to hip-hop culture at the time: a change of subject from the East Coast vs. West Coast feud that reached a tragic climax with the murders of Tupac Shakur and Biggie Smalls in 1996 and 1997, respectively. Lipsitz’s discussion of the album focuses more on the intersection of African American, Haitian, and, especially in the albums’ cover of Bob Marley’s “No Woman, No Cry,” Jamaican influences. Lipsitz does not, however, limit himself to “the pan-African world that produced the Fugees” (43). The crossover referenced in the chapter’s title is multilayered: the ever-expanding ripples of connections include those within the Caribbean (Haitian interest in Jamaican reggae as well as “Kreyòl-Spanish hybridity” [33]); within nations (the Chinese presence in Jamaica that had a significant influence on the production of Jamaican popular music); and between African and Asian diasporic communities worldwide.² The omnipresent but often overlooked contributions of people of Asian descent to global popular music is a recurrent issue in *Footsteps*; the latter half of the Fugees chapter is devoted to this topic. The work of Filipino American musicians in particular is acknowledged throughout the book: besides Joe Bataan, whose 1967 cover of the Impressions’ “Gypsy Woman” is sampled on *The Score*, Lipsitz recognizes the contributions and talents of Afro-Filipina soul singer Sugar Pie DeSanto, Allan Pineda (better known as apl.de.ap of the Black-Eyed Peas), and virtuosic turntablist Richard Quitevis (a.k.a. DJ Q-Bert), among others.

Even while acknowledging the message of songs like “No Woman, No Cry,” which “enables the Fugees to fuse the history of Haitian immigrants with the history of deindustrialization and economic restructuring in urban ghettos in the United States” (31), Lipsitz is hardly Pollyannish when it comes to the potential of popular music to act as an agent for change. “The Fugees are a commercial act, not a political organization,” Lipsitz advises, and despite

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their apparent social consciousness, “their music and lyrics should not be read as political manifestos or even as guides to the actual political stances and beliefs of the artists who create them” (41–42). As evidence, he points to what he calls “indefensibly racist characterizations of Asian store owners” on *The Score* (45) and later, in the chapter on the hip-hop hearings, to “hip hop’s ties to sweatshop labor” (181) as contradictory, counterprogressive elements of hip-hop culture. Nonetheless, the chapter makes an effective contribution to the book’s primary goal: to illustrate how identifiable political inequities are a catalyst for migration, through which emerge “interethnic coalitions and conflicts in North American cities” and, in turn, uniquely transcultural products that testify to the complex histories of their making.

Another concept introduced early on is what Lipsitz describes as “containerization.” He points to two developments that have marked the age of digital capitalism: the eclipse of economies of scale (mass production of identical items) by economies of scope (the production of a wide range of differentiated but largely interchangeable items intended for different target markets); and the “emergence of fully linked and integrated forms of production, distribution, and consumption” (238). Inspired by the use of automated cranes and interchangeable crates for shipping, containerization enacts a “social pedagogy” geared toward “training consumers to desire difference and distance from the tastes of other consumers” (21), which, ironically, because these are in fact “differences without a difference” (14), leads to homogenization. The effects of containerization on popular music cut both ways. There can be “logical outcomes”—for example, “the growth of prefabricated musical acts” like *N Sync* and reality shows like *Pop Stars*, on which young female contestants eagerly competed for membership in Eden’s *Crush* facing “the dilemma of proving that they were special, different, unique, completely individual by proving their mastery of exactly the same shared social codes that construct each of them as interchangeable parts of a mass market” (10). There can also be unexpected results: African American teens in Detroit crafted techno in the 1980s and 1990s using “computers to monitor, audit, sequence, and control sounds—the same computers that made containerization possible by monitoring, auditing, sequencing, and controlling the unloading of ships” (245). Much as digitization and integrated marketing transformed senses of place by creating new, virtual sites of consumption trafficked by worldwide consumers of girl/boy-band pop, techno artists responded to the neglect of actual urban sites by summoning new market-bridging communities in ad hoc dance spaces through digitized fusions of Parliament, Kraftwerk, and the Monkees.

Lipsitz draws heavily on existing scholarship, bringing into dialogue the essential points of others’ work—his chapter on merengue and Dominican

migration is the only one that seems slightly overly reliant on summarizing information published elsewhere. The first half of “Weeds in a Vacant Lot” is, however, based on his own mid-1990s interviews with three former BAG members—saxophonists Oliver Lake and Julius Hemphill, and spoken-word artist and actor Vincent Terrell—and builds on his earlier work focusing on St. Louis (Lipsitz 1991; see also Looker 2004). Lipsitz cares deeply about the fate and dynamics of cities. The techno chapter argues that the music’s emergence implicates its context: deindustrialization “transformed vibrant and lively neighborhoods into block after block of abandoned houses and storefronts” (241). Similarly, Lipsitz’s discussion of BAG documents the thriving cultural and civic activity in the musicians’ neighborhoods, the dispersal of residents through urban renewal, then the reflowering of community ideals in other places through new musical collaborations. BAG was in fact created in the image of another multi-media cooperative, Chicago’s Association for the Advancement of Creative Musicians (AACM), whose participants included transplants from St. Louis like Lester Bowie and Phil Cohran. The chapter highlights the broad stylistic fluency of BAG associates who “drew deftly on the classical, jazz, and gospel music of their community” having “honed their craft as performers in rhythm and blues combos” (114). Later in the chapter, the scene shifts to Los Angeles, where the construction of Dodger Stadium in the late 1950s was expedited by labeling as “blighted” the tight-knit, predominantly Mexican American rural community already at that location. Even while describing Cooder, who also produced the mega-hit movie and recording *Buena Vista Social Club*, as “a romantic white interpreter of ‘lost’ music created by people of color,” Lipsitz expresses admiration for the “extraordinary, energy, passion, and power” of *Chavez Ravine*, an “album [that] may well be American studies’ greatest (and, so far, only) hit” (125–27). The album’s fourteen tracks, performed by musicians that include Tex-Mex conjunto accordion wizard Flaco Jimenez, Chicano bassist and rhythm and blues bandleader Don Tosti, and David Hidalgo of Los Lobos, “evoke the lively dynamism of the barrio before urban renewal” (127). “Perhaps more important,” Lipsitz writes, “*Chavez Ravine* identifies urban renewal as one of the main sources of enduring interracial enmity in Los Angeles and as one of the main culprits in the destruction of interracial and intercultural cooperation” (127–28). To Lipsitz, popular music lays bare the legacy of policies that undermine potentially liberatory alliances yet also points to the hope for their regeneration.

This journal’s readers may note that despite being a book about popular music, and in spite of Lipsitz’s obviously deep and long engagement with popular music, “the music itself”—that vexed and invariably scare-quoted phrase by which I mean music in its primarily sonic aspects—has an ambiguo-

ous and, occasionally, not entirely satisfying place in *Footsteps in the Dark*. Lipsitz has consulted the most authoritative English-language scholarship on the genres of music he discusses—Elizabeth McAlister on *rara*, Helena Simonett on *banda*, Deborah Pacini-Hernandez and Paul Austerlitz on Dominican popular music, Lisa Waxer on transnational salsa, etc. At times, however, it is difficult to determine when observations about musical style or specific recordings come from the author's own listening and when they are passed on from his sources. It is fair to say—and I suspect Lipsitz would agree—that, while there are many references to instrumentation, performance contexts, and, in some cases, representative repertory, for one in search of in-depth information about, say, *banda* or *merengue* or *salsa*—for instance, what these musics sound like and what stylistic features distinguish them from other types of music—this is not intended to be the book to consult.

That said, with so many illustrative cases to consider, there may be moments when one finds him/herself wanting more specifics about the music under discussion, especially when Lipsitz moves in fairly quick succession from example to example and style to style. In the *salsa* chapter, for example, Lipsitz begins by discussing the debate over the posthumous repatriation of the iconic *salsa* singer Héctor Lavoe, who died in New York in 1993; the question of where the Puerto Rican-born singer's body belonged is invoked allegorically to consider Puerto Rican music and migration in light of the island's status as a US territory. Far from focusing on *salsa*—or colonialism, for that matter—Lipsitz also touches in varying degrees on *jibaro* music (the music associated with white, rural-dwelling Puerto Rican farmers); *bomba* and *plena* (the traditional music associated with Afro-Puerto Ricans); Cuban *son* and Latin jazz; the World War I military brass band of James Reese Europe, which recruited several of its members from Puerto Rico; *cachi cachi* (a Hawaiian party music “played on the *quarto* and derivative of the Puerto Rican *jibaro* style” [228, (sic)]); *bugalú*, the 1960s style popular among Nuyoricans that fused rhythm and blues and soul with Afro-Cuban dance music; the strongly Latin-influenced music of the Los Angeles-based, Congolese-Angolan singer Ricardo Lemvo and the “complicated cultural politics of Congolese music” (233); and, finally, hip-hop and the at-once progressive and “extremely retrograde” politics of the late, Bronx-born, Puerto Rican MC Big Pun. “In the face of direct colonization and economic exploitation, military conquest, cultural marginality, and poverty,” Lipsitz summarizes, “the Puerto Rican culture created overseas and at home has taken a part of Puerto Rico to the rest of the world and in turn has absorbed back into Puerto Rico ideas and influences unavailable through other means” (233–34).

If such a gamut seems somewhat myriad and unwieldy, if compelling, then you get some sense of reading *Footsteps in the Dark*. Lipsitz can be positively virtuosic in his ability to weave together observations and insights from a range of scholarship. One often gets the sense that he provides the depth of analysis and metacritique absent from his sources, individually and collectively. Still, the expansive compass of each chapter may be a challenge to some readers, who might be uncertain of the intended takeaway, particularly with regard to music. The chapter titles themselves, whose formulaic structure looks so neat and tidy in the table of contents, can even sometimes feel like a distraction since they raise unmet expectations of specificity. Lipsitz might, however, argue that thinking about ostensibly discrete musical styles in terms of their shifting contexts, motley influences, mutable forms, and shades of gray is exactly the point.

A solution to the problem, if one chooses to think of it that way, may lie in the four themes described above. The chapter on merengue is about migration, but so are the chapters on banda, salsa, and Haiti. The discussion of BAG and *Chavez Ravine* addresses deindustrialization, but so too do the chapters on hip-hop and techno. The issues of transnationalism and hybridity recur in most chapters. In some ways, this gives the book a strong sense of cohesion and purpose; in others, it is difficult to encapsulate the book's musical argument since a range of styles are discussed in similar ways through reference to a seemingly inexhaustible trove of provocative evidence. I found myself pondering what the book would look like if it were structured around the handful of thematic strands, supported with stylistically various musical examples, instead of ten separate studies whose subjects multiply over the course of each chapter. The chapters on *Pop Stars* and techno, for example, were purportedly about the hidden histories of digital capitalism and deindustrialization, respectively; both, however, address containerization, the epistemic shift to economies of scope from economies of scale, and the cognitive remapping of space and time facilitated by digital technology. Consolidating these discussions somehow might have made the mutually reinforcing effects of deindustrialization and digital capitalism even more stark and compelling.

On a handful of occasions, coverage of so much stylistic territory resulted in what I felt were oversimplifications of musical issues. On page 30, for example, Lipsitz states that rara music, heard during six-week-long street festivals in Haiti that begin immediately after the end of Carnival and continue until Easter week, "shares many affinities with hip hop," citing only rara's "performative orality." From an Afro-diasporic or African retentions perspective, one could very plausibly make this argument; in certain field recordings of rara one might hear repeating, looped grooves reminiscent of

hip-hop beats. And it is true that some Haitian rara and *mizik rasin* (roots music) groups have embraced and incorporated elements of hip-hop—the self-produced debut album by the rara band Djarara (2007), which leads processions every Sunday in Brooklyn’s Prospect Park during the summer, is one example. But if one *listened* to representative hip-hop and rara recordings side-by-side, it would be a stretch to link so casually the sound of the hocketing *konè* trumpets and *bambou* horns, hand-held percussion, and collective singing of a rara procession to a hip-hop jam. The underlying “affinities” that are theoretically demonstrable through careful analysis are not, to my ears at least, so sonically self-evident as to preclude delineating them. The sonic and the social frequently offer different bodies of evidence, a distinction that merits acknowledgement. Elsewhere, Lipsitz claims that Rafael Hernández and other Puerto Rican musicians recruited by James Reese Europe came to the band having gained “considerable experience as improvisers playing *contradanzas* and *danzones*” (218). In fact, these tightly arranged, rondo-structured creole dance musics, usually performed in bourgeois ballroom settings, typically would have offered limited opportunities for improvisation, unlike other vernacular musical styles (see, e.g., Manuel 1998:128). Likewise, the characterization of the Trinidadian popular music soca as “a genre that is a blend of soul and calypso” (149) is a frequently repeated claim, though, as Shannon Dudley (1996) has noted, likely an apocryphal one.³ Only glancing consideration of certain stylistic questions results in an occasional resort to statements like “Lyrics of merengue songs often chronicle the experiences of workers and refugees” (145), a claim that, while true, is both too general—being one that could apply to virtually any style of popular music—and too specific, since the topical range of merengue lyrics is certainly far broader than this.

Whether one considers such matters undermining flaws or pedantic niggles, they should not distract from the book’s trenchant analysis of the social forces and historical legacies to which the various musical phenomena point. Because Lipsitz finds history encoded everywhere, there are fascinating insights on virtually every page. This is especially true when he turns his attention to detailing the biographical histories of individual musicians, savoring “the relentless delineation of particularities” (103), a phrase that conveys one of the book’s greatest strengths. Lipsitz focuses on those who, despite surface appearances and reductionist dichotomies, cross borders to willfully and strategically occupy what Christopher Waterman (2000) has described as “the excluded middle,” individuals who, as Lipsitz puts it, problematize preconceived categories and combat “the everyday indignities of racial discrimination by carrying social construction to an extreme” (208). Thus we read about Patrick Shannon, the Irish American cableman from Brooklyn who grew up on heavy metal but later became a successful

merengue singer; Rick Murphy, an Anglo-American who sang Vietnamese folk songs, ballads, and *vọng cổ* (songs from southern Vietnamese musical theater) at an Orange County, California, club catering to Vietnamese refugees; African American keyboardist John Roland Redd who passed as Mexican (adopting the pseudonym “Juan Rolando”) before transforming himself into a turban-wearing South Asian “Indian” who gazed seductively into the camera as host of the popular 1950s television show *Adventures in Music with Korla Pandit*; and Lee Brown, who, like Redd, reinvented himself first as “Indian” to avoid anti-black racism, then as a Maxwell Klinger-like cross-dresser to avoid military service, and finally as a “Mexican” named Babs Gonzales, who went on to enjoy a successful and influential career as a bebop vocalese singer. Throughout *Footsteps in the Dark*—and especially in the chapter “Masquerades and Mixtures,” for this reader the highlight of the book—Lipsitz skillfully deploys such examples of musicians and musical styles with composite histories and fluid cultural affiliations to highlight the inescapable hybridity of cultural expression, the fundamental connectedness of aggrieved groups in an increasingly transnational world, and the political efficacy of strategic anti-essentialism and multiracial activist coalitions.

The use of popular music, blurred boundaries, and reconstructed identities for the purpose of pointed political critique is an ongoing strategy. In 2007, Shawn Kiehne, a white New Mexican who became immersed in Mexican culture working on his family’s cattle ranch near El Paso, Texas, released *Algo Sucedió*, an all-Spanish CD of norteño music and corridos. Emphasizing the immediacy of his relationship to the music, Kiehne said, “I am not some manufactured record label idea. This is music that I love. This is a culture that I love. This is me.” At the same time, Kiehne’s chosen stage name, “El Gringo,” expresses his keen awareness of the social distance that separates him from the culture that he has fully embraced as his own. He recalled his experience working side-by-side with Mexican seasonal laborers: “I learned to see the world through the eyes of those vaqueros. If I had five kids and couldn’t support them in Mexico, I would do the same thing that they are doing . . . Anyone who leaves their homeland to come here and look for a better life and work that hard should be admired, not criticized.” The lyrics (in translation) of one of the album’s tracks, “El Corrido del Gringo,” communicates the social activism of Kiehne’s adopted identity: “I respect immigrants and of this I’m sure / We need to be good neighbors and not build a wall / To my illegal friends who live in the U.S. / As a gringo I want to tell you to keep dreaming and fighting / This country needs your effort and your work” (Kun 2008).⁴

Lipsitz addresses these very issues head-on in his chapter on banda, one of three chapters that examine how popular music has archived the experience of Latin American migration to the United States. Banda, which

originated in the mid-nineteenth century from brass band traditions in rural northwest Mexico, especially the state of Sinaloa, became, in a newly urbanized, transregional, and commercial form, part of a bona fide musical movement among Mexican Americans in the Western US during the early 1990s. Hundreds of banda social clubs sprouted in Los Angeles, Lipsitz's geographic focus, where members performed the *quebradita*, banda's signature dance, at weekend parties that became "an arena where Mexicanidad was honored, cherished, and prized" (58). The "horn-heavy instrumentation," including banda's characteristic oom-pahing tuba, was a symbolically significant sonic marker that distinguished banda from "U.S. songs sung in English and accompanied mainly by electric guitar" (65)—though a subsequent offshoot of banda, *tecnobanda*, embraced more synthesized sounds. Clearly, Lipsitz argues, the banda phenomenon was "more than merely about music." The "power and greed of big business interests in Mexico and the United States" (73), in particular "a brand of economic fundamentalism favoring 'free' markets" (70), triggered displacements through which "banda music emerged as a subtle and significant register of the social dislocations engendered by the rapid mobility of capital and the mass migrations of low-wage workers across national borders in an age of hypermobile capital" (57). As one banda club member testified, in the face of hostilities faced in the U.S., including exploitative wages, unsafe working conditions, harsh policing, hate crimes, and anti-immigration sentiment, "the banda movement helped young people to address the issue of being Mexican. To tell who they are or to fight against injustice and discrimination" (64).⁵ I wanted Lipsitz to complicate his claim that prior to the banda boom Mexican cultural nationalism "had relatively little meaning in Mexico" (63). In the decades following the Mexican Revolution, and stimulated in large part by the 1921 centennial of the country's independence, nativist music and culture played a significant role in a comprehensive, state-sponsored nation-building project intended to bring unity to a historically fragmented population (Vaughan and Lewis 2006). Nonetheless, the chapter paints a vivid picture of the reasons for migration and of the ways in which banda dances served a range of social functions, from renegotiating gender relations, to appreciating the heterogeneity of Mexican immigrants' histories, to facilitating intra-group "physical movement across neighborhood boundaries" (62).

Similar historical narratives inform the chapters on salsa and merengue, though with more emphasis on hybridities contained within and called into being by these musics. Both chapters deal with working-class migration from the Caribbean to New York City and the ways in which musical elements deemphasized in homogenizing nationalist contexts in Puerto Rico and the Dominican Republic were made more openly manifest following migration.

Through musical interaction with African Americans and Afro-Cubans in New York, for example, many Puerto Rican musicians began to foreground “Afro-Latin elements that were muted sometimes in Puerto Rican music”; thus “by moving from San Juan to Harlem. . . Spanish-speaking Puerto Rican musicians had become ‘Black’ in a new way” (219, 222). Likewise, the racial ideology driving Rafael Trujillo’s aggressive cultural policy that established jazz-tinged big band merengue—based on a style of merengue originally associated with the white Spanish population living in the Cibao region, a style known as *merengue cibaño* (misspelled in the book “merengue ciabeno” [138])—as the national music of the Dominican Republic was defused by Dominican migration: “the transnational nature of Dominican society reveals that nation to be more complex and more connected to other nations than the old nationalist merengues could ever admit” (151).

A theoretical concept to which *Footsteps in the Dark* repeatedly returns is Juan Flores’s notion of “branching out” (Flores 1985), which Lipsitz summarizes as “changing through contact but moving in all directions toward other people of color” (227), “a fusion of cultures and styles that has little to do with assimilation into an Anglo center” (65). In addition to “Puerto Ricans [who] become more aware of the African elements in their culture when they move to New York” (227), instances of “branching out” cited by Lipsitz include the variety of popular musics—“techno, house, rock, merengue, bolero, ranchera, and cumbia” (65)—played at banda dances in Los Angeles; and the Dominican-born musician and founder of Fania Records Johnny Pacheco, who, after coming to New York in 1946, gained “entry into Puerto Rican culture,” leading to additional “contact with dark-skinned Afro-Cuban musicians, creative interaction with African American jazz musicians, and cultural and political alliances with the civil rights and Black Power movements” (144–45). A musical example that would have supported—and, again, complicated—Lipsitz’s use of Flores’s ideas is Dominican singer and trumpeter Kinito Mendez’s 2000 pop merengue hit “Nueva York Pasando Lista” (New York Calls the Roll), which gives shout outs to a number of constituencies in New York’s Spanish-speaking community, asking “Qué sería de Nueva York sin ese sabor hispano?” (What would New York be without this Hispanic flavor?). Mendez’s song both branches out, proclaiming alliances with geographically dispersed countries ranging from Mexico to Peru to Panama, and, by emphasizing linguistic ties, conspicuously leaves out, among others, its most immediate neighbor Haiti, reinforcing the longstanding Hispanocentric, anti-Haitian bias that fueled Trujillo’s iron-fisted purge of any trace of Afro-Dominican national identity. The messiness of alliances forged and alliances more tentatively embraced might have also been fruitfully probed by considering, for instance, not only the

ways in which the banda movement “represents a powerful rejection of assimilation” (64) but also the ways in which its enthusiasts “were symbolically fighting for citizenship,” as Sydney Hutchinson (2007:208) has suggested. In these discussions, Lipsitz seeks above all to “bring to the surface many of the heterogeneous realities that the homogeneity of nationalism once obscured” (152). This message lies at the heart of his observations on jazz, and in particular *Jazz*, an American triumphalist project that “occludes the internationalism that has informed the art of so many jazz musicians” and “obscures the history of the nation’s role in the world and the presence of the whole world within the nation” (81, 90).

Footsteps in the Dark’s tendency toward analysis of “concrete case studies, not philosophical abstraction” (271), highlighting underexplored connections between and within these specific examples, is in line not only with Lipsitz’s earlier work but also with provocative scholarly trends with important implications for the study of music’s relationship to society, politics, culture, and identity. Even as many college and university music departments have become more open to scholarship that bridges what have traditionally been their three principal domains of research—historical musicology, ethnomusicology, and music theory—and even as interdisciplinary approaches to studying music have multiplied and been mainstreamed (initially under the banner of the now somewhat quaint-sounding “new musicology”), Lipsitz and other scholars, mostly outside of music departments, have pointed to other important ways of complicating the purview of musical study. Decades ago, commentators as philosophically disparate as Albert Murray and Amiri Baraka noted the “inescapably mulatto nature of American culture” (Murray 1970:22) and the “hopelessly interwoven fabric of American life where blacks and whites pass so quickly as to become only grays” (Jones 1963:111).⁶ More recently, several writers have suggested that rather than delimit how we think and study along the axes of nation, culture, race, ethnicity, sex, or gender, we instead acknowledge the heterogeneity of origins previously considered pure and the compositeness and interdependence of identities that are too often thought of as discrete.

Paul Gilroy, for example, has asked if, instead of an approach that “typically identifies music with tradition and cultural continuity,” we might explore that same music in terms of “transnational structures of circulation and intercultural exchange” in order to consider how “a self-consciously synthetic culture can support . . . novel political identities” (Gilroy 1993:82–83, 87). At an even more fundamental level than the transnational flows linked to globalization, Robin Kelley and Vijay Prashad eschew the insidiously pat feel-goodness of “multiculturalism” for *polyculturalism*: “A polyculturalist sees the world constituted by the interchange of cultural forms, while mul-

multiculturalism sees the world constituted by different (and discrete) cultures that we can place into categories and study with respect” (Prashad 2001:67). According to such a view, hybridity is less the exception than the rule.

Our lines of biological descent are about as pure as O.J.’s blood sample, and our cultural lines of descent are about as mixed up as a pot of gumbo.... [S]o-called “mixed race” children are not the only ones with a claim to multiple heritages. All of us, and I mean ALL of us, are the inheritors of European, African, Native American, and even Asian pasts, even if we can’t exactly trace our blood lines to all of these continents. (Kelley 1999:6)

Multiculturalism, in other words, aims to teach us something new about Others. Polyculturalism challenges us to learn something new about ourselves.⁷

Though less focused on individuals than on the potential of collectivities, legal scholars and critical race theorists Lani Guinier and Gerald Torres’s concept of “political race” insists upon racialized identities, not for the purpose of “a cultural or race nationalism that made one’s personal identity their political project,” but rather to theorize how “individuals who do not share characteristics traditionally associated with biological race may, through their conscious association and participation, identify as members or allies” (Guinier and Torres 2002:21). As *Footsteps in the Dark* persuasively insists, this is particularly true in an age of transnationalism and globalization that has seen an “evaporating congruence of physical place and cultural space” (234). Despite their differing emphases and goals, these various conceptual frameworks, along with Waterman’s “excluded middle,” Flores’s “branching out,” and Lipsitz’s “strategic anti-essentialism,” all accept the galvanizing and organizational power of tactical essentialism but only insofar as it pushes us toward recognition of the complexity of our histories and identities and of the broader political nexuses in which our respective experiences situate us.⁸

For music scholars, this would necessarily entail something more than the inclusion of a Charlie Pride track on a country music compilation CD, a sidebar on Machito in a jazz history text, a vague acknowledgement of the classical music backgrounds of countless jazz musicians, painstaking documentation of “Africanisms” in African American popular music, or passing mention of the fact that Western Swing pioneer Bob Wills credited his early music education to his interactions with the black sharecroppers his family lived and worked alongside. And despite a substantial body of literature on the topic, music history survey courses might consider more centrally how the eighteenth-century Viennese fascination with “Turkish music” and the *alla turca* style, a vogue rooted in the shifting balance of

power between the Ottoman and Habsburg empires, was audible in musical discourse that can be more fully comprehended in light of this history and through which categories that include “the West,” “Europe,” “civilization,” “Classical style,” and “art music” were negotiated and understood. The goal of such approaches to studying music becomes the documentation of not just hospitable and artistically productive cultural encounters but also of truly generative and defining intermixtures.

Footsteps in the Dark is George Lipsitz’s most ambitious book to date exclusively on music, and perhaps his most passionate, candid, and unflinching period. Despite an occasionally precarious balance of meticulousness and synopsis, the heart of the book is Lipsitz’s cumulative message, and that message—about deepening our understanding of historical processes through the study of popular music, about the relationship between historical knowledge and social justice, about how transnational realities produce “new cultural forms speaking to new social identities” with the potential for new social relations—is timely and of critical importance. Lipsitz’s own gravitation over the course of his career from American studies to transnational cultural studies—or perhaps post-national American studies—reflects his view, conveyed in *Footsteps in the Dark*, of “the problems with studying music in just one city or nation” (233). As he explains in his eloquent Epilogue, these methodological questions stem from political ones: “In an increasingly interdependent world it is difficult to see how any substantial problems can be solved only one nation at a time” (277).

To progressive-minded, activist scholars, the relationship between musical experience, culture, and social change is consequential to consider. Even if popular music can help *express* our politics, and even if the lessons of history gleaned from popular culture should *guide* our politics, as Guinier and Torres remind us, “Culture does not do the *work* of politics” (2002:20, emphasis added), a point to which Lipsitz alludes as well. Listening to—or, for that matter, studying—Dead Prez or Bob Marley or banda does not make us “political” any more than it defines who we are. Since identities are endlessly hybrid, heterogeneous, and polymorphic—with the now-black Chinese South Africans providing a case in point—whereas one’s political convictions and ethical compass are, hopefully, more stable, “we cannot draw our politics from our identities but instead must construct our identities through our politics” (202). But if, as Lipsitz believes, “our entire understanding of music and society may hinge on what kinds of histories we valorize” (104), the next step is determining how hidden histories, once revealed, can at least become part of the official record.

Notes

1. Several headlines read: “In South Africa, Chinese is the New Black.” On Comedy Central’s *The Colbert Report*, Stephen Colbert quipped before the 2008 presidential election that as a member of a group that has experienced discrimination, senior citizen John McCain could become the first black President of the United States. See also Ho and Mullen (2008).
2. For a compelling analysis of the relationship between the African and Asian diasporas from a global-historical perspective, see Prashad (2001).
3. Dudley writes: “While the term ‘soca’ is most often said to derive from ‘soul calypso,’ implying the influence of black music from the US, [Trinidadian folklorist Selwyn] Ahyoung cites Lord Shorty [the calypsonian generally credited with originating soca] as saying that he intended the word to be spelled ‘sokah,’ ‘to reflect the East Indian influence’” (1996:286–87).
4. My thanks to Naomi Zeichner for drawing my attention to this article.
5. In a monograph that appeared since the publication of *Footsteps in the Dark*, Sydney Hutchinson (2007) describes the significance of 1990s banda/tecnobanda music and *quebradita* performance within border youth cultures. Hutchinson also discusses the related though more self-consciously transnational *música duranguense* popularized in the following decade by Chicago’s Mexican American communities, a response, she argues, to renewed anti-immigrant backlash following September 11th.
6. Interestingly, even Larry Neal’s manifesto “The Black Aesthetic,” a touchstone of the Black Arts Movement characterized most often as quintessential cultural nationalist rhetoric, makes multiple references to “the Third World of which Black America is a part” (1968:39).
7. Taking into account as well power relations and the terms of manifesting shared culture is, however, essential since opportunities to express or even inhabit one’s polycultural identity are highly contingent. Les Back (2002), for example, seeking to rebut “critics and writers [who] seem obsessed with reducing white involvement in black music to a very limited range of archetypal possibilities” (230), has highlighted the interracial collaboration at Fame Recording Studios in Muscle Shoals, Alabama, where some of the greatest southern soul records were made. “I want to argue,” Back writes, “that the studio itself became a context in which a kind of innocent nonracialized world was lived and realized in sound.” Back makes the crucially important point that as southerners who grew up in close proximity to black culture, white house band members Steve Cropper, Donald “Duck” Dunn, Spooner Oldham, and others, backing singers like Aretha Franklin and Wilson Pickett, “carried diversity within themselves” (251). However, Back mentions but applies no critical pressure to the fact that African American musicians—for instance, urban blues singer Bobby “Blue” Bland, who noted “I still know more about hillbilly tunes than I do about blues” (265)—had virtually no opportunity to appear on country music records of comparable stature. Here is a clear case where ownership of the means of production made it possible for certain embodied diversities to emerge and not others. This should invite more complex analysis of both the degree to which white “involvement” in the making of iconic soul records was a matter of racially transcendent cultural hybridity laid bare and the extent to which it was also a reflection of structures of power. George Lewis (2001–2) has raised related issues in his discussion of “black” and “white” experimental music in New York City in the 1970s and 80s.
8. It is important to note that Spivak, who defines strategic essentialism as “a strategic use of positivist essentialism in a scrupulously visible political interest” (Spivak 1988:13), proposed the tactical use of essentialism as a political tactic, not a theory. She in fact acknowledged that embracing strategic essentialism was a temporary position, the trade-off of which was

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“to jettison one’s own purity as a theorist”: “You pick up the universal that will give you the power to fight against the other side, and what you are throwing away by doing that is your theoretical purity” (Spivak 1990:12).

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