Afrocentrism through Afro-American Music: from the 1960's until the Early 2000's

by

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Abstract

Afrocentrism is an intellectual, political, sociological, historical and cultural movement principally born out of Black people's constant struggle against racism and oppression. Thus, this ideology dates back to the era of slavery and was born in the Black diaspora as a response to Eurocentrism which views the world from a European perspective, implying superiority of Europeans and more generally Westerners, namely Whites, over non-Europeans, namely non-Whites, especially Blacks. The United States of America being an ancient land of slavery, it is not surprising that Afrocentrism emerged within its society. It has been notably significant from the late 19th onwards and has impacted on different aspects of social life, including literature, politics, religion, economy, sport and music. Since the 1960's, Afrocentrism has been particularly visible through music which has become an obvious new force in America. Indeed, in the 1960's, it was an integral part of soul music which accompanied the civil rights movements. Then, it has integrated most genres which followed up such as funk, rap and modern rhythm and blues. After giving a brief definition and review of Afrocentrism in the United States, this paper will explore its impact on Afro-American music from the 1960's until the early 2000's.

Key Words

Afrocentrism; Black pride; funk, hip-hop; Pan-Africanism; rap; rhythm and blues; soul.

Introduction

Afrocentrism is an intellectual, political, sociological, historical and cultural movement principally born out of Black people's constant struggle against racism and oppression. Thus, this ideology dates back to the era of slavery and was born in the Black diaspora as a response to Eurocentrism which views the world from a European perspective, implying superiority of Europeans and more generally Westerners, namely Whites, over non-Europeans, namely non-Whites, especially Blacks. The United States of America being an ancient land of slavery, it is not surprising that Afrocentrism emerged within its society. It has been notably significant from the late 19th onwards and has impacted on different aspects of social life, including literature, politics, religion, economy, sport and music. George Padmore, William Edward Burghardt Du Bois, Jamaican activist Marcus Mosiah Garvey, Elijah Muhammad, Malcolm X, Senegalese scientist, historian and anthropologist Cheikh Anta Diop, boxer Muhammad Ali and contemporary African-American scholar Molefi Kete Asante, just to name a few, were/ are all leading figures of Afrocentrism. Since the 1960's, this Africa-centered ideological movement has been particularly visible through music which has become an obvious new force in America. Indeed, in the 1960's, it was an integral part of soul music – embodied by Curtis Mayfield, James Brown, Sam Cooke and so forth – which accompanied the civil rights movements. Then, it has integrated most genres which followed up such as funk, rap and modern rhythm and blues sometimes referred as neo-soul, confirmed by the music of artists like Isaac Hayes, Public Enemy, NWA, Erykah Badu and The Fugees among others. After giving a brief definition and review of Afrocentrism in the United States, this paper will explore its impact on Afro-American music from the 1960's until the early 2000's.

Afrocentrism in the United States

First of all, it is important to precise that Afrocentrism is a movement first and foremost born out of Black people's constant struggle against racism and oppression. Indeed, Afrocentrists argue that for centuries, Blacks, namely Africans and people of African descents, have been politically, economically and culturally dominated, mainly through slavery and colonization, by Europeans, that is to say Whites. They also defend the idea that Africa was the birthplace of world civilization[1], especially ancient Ethiopia and ancient Egypt, but that Africans' technologies and inventions were stolen by Europeans who then falsified history. So, Afrocentrists advocate the need for Blacks to appreciate the achievements of traditional African civilizations and to articulate their own history, heritage, system of values and culture which, according to them, have been devalued by Whites. Thus, Afrocentrism not only deals with scholarship and literature, but also with politics, religion, philosophy, language, clothing, cuisine, hairstyle, music or dance.

Afrocentrism finds its origins in earlier Black nationalist movements, including Ethiopianism, which according to historian Giulia Bonacci is "an [ancient] ideological matrix, created from and around the name Ethiopia, which originated in black worlds"[2], and Pan-Africanism, "a political doctrine, as well as a movement, with the aim of unifying and uplifting African nations and the African Diaspora as a universal African community"[3]. Moreover, Pan-Africanism became very influential in the United States in the early 20th century with the emergence of Trinidadian-born George Padmore, African-American scholar W.E.B. Du Bois – co-founder of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) –, Jamaican activist Marcus Garvey – founder of the Universal Negro Improvement Association (UNIA), founder of the Black Star Line and pioneer of the back-to-Africa movement – and

Elijah Muhammad – leader of the Nation of Islam (1934-1975) – who were all leading Pan-Africanists and Afrocentrists. Equally important to Afrocentrism in the United States and elsewhere are figures like the late Ghanaian Kwame Nkrumah – former President of Ghana who was significantly influential in the founding of the Organization of African Unity (OAU)[4] –, the late Senegalese Cheikh Anta Diop – who largely wrote about the cultural unity of Africa, the African nature of Egyptian civilization and the "stealing" of African innovations by Westerners –, Egyptologist, linguist and historian Congolese Théophile Obenga and Ghanaian-born Molefi Kete Asante – current Professor in the Department of African American Studies at Temple University and founder of the theory of Afrocentricity[5].

Afrocentrism gained considerable legitimacy in the United States from the 1960's to a certain extent because of the civil rights movement personified by prominent black activists such as Martin Luther King, Jr., Malcolm X, Muhammad Ali, Jesse Jackson and the Black Panthers. During the 1960's, Black people's claims not only applied to politics, but to different spheres of society including economy, sport and culture. Besides, a wide range of mediums were used to protest including marches, sits-in, but also clothing styles, attitude, literature, art and music. Moreover, Afro-American music was exploding during this period of time thanks to rhythm and blues and above all soul music whose main ambassadors were Curtis Mayfield, James Brown, Sam Cooke and Nina Simone among others. It is important to note that these musical genres became successful not only because of the talent of the above-mentioned artists, but also because of the work of record labels like Motown and Stax. Thus, during the civil rights movements, such singers used their gifted voice and lively black musical rhythms and melodies not only to denounce the various injustices black people were the victims of in White America, but also to openly express Black and African pride, the bedrock of Afrocentrism.

Subsequently, rhythm and blues and soul music paved the way for funk, rap and modern rhythm and blues, all genres encapsulating some elements of Afrocentrism. It should be emphasized that during the 1980's, Afrocentrism gained importance again as African-Americans felt estranged from President Ronald Reagan's conservative revolution. It must also be mentioned that it was actually during the 1980's that the term "African-American" truly emerged thanks to the efforts of black activist and Baptist minister Jesse Jackson:

> In the late 1970's, some blacks began to use the term "African American." Despite early efforts by certain African Americans to win acceptance for the term, its use did not gain widespread acceptance until December 1988. At that time, Jesse Jackson summoned 75 black leaders to a conference on setting a black agenda. He urged them to endorse the use of the term "African American." "To be called African American has cultural integrity," Jackson said. "It puts us in our proper historical context."[6]

Afrocentrism through Afro-American Music: from the 1960's until the early 2000's

This second part analyzes Afrocentrism through African-American music from the 1960's until the beginning of the 21st century. Afro-American artists and songs conveying an Afrocentric message during that period of time are so numerous, that mentioning all of them would be of course impossible. Therefore, one must keep in mind that the following list of African-American singers using their art to support Afrocentric principles is not exhaustive.

The 1960's

During the 1960's, the decade of the civil rights movements, Afrocentrism obviously exploded and most Black-American singers conveyed Pan-African, Black nationalist and Afrocentric messages, to begin with Curtis Mayfield, well-known for "his civil-rights consciousness."[7] Indeed, Curtis Mayfield played a critical role in the development of Afrocentrism through his music, especially with tracks like "Keep On Pushing" (1964):

> I've got to keep on pushing
> I can't stop now
> Move up a little higher
> Some way, somehow
> 'Cause I've got my strength
> And it don't make sense
> Not to keep on pushin'…

and "We're A Winner" (1967):

> We're a winner
> And never let anybody say
> Boy, you can't make it
> 'Cause a feeble mind is in your way
> No more tears do we cry
> And we have finally dried our eyes
> And we're movin' on up (movin' on up)
> Lawd have mercy
> We're movin' on up (movin' on up)…

In both songs, Curtis Mayfield really pays tribute to black people, encouraging them to move forward in life despite difficulties such as racism which was very common in the American society of the time. Furthermore, the singer implies that Blacks are equal to Whites, if not superior, and so for that reason he clearly says that Blacks must not be afraid of seeking power. Curtis Mayfield truly became a symbol of Black pride with these two songs; moreover "Keep On Pushing" became an anthem for Martin Luther King, Jr. and the civil rights movements while "We're A Winner" became an anthem for the Black Power movement. Last but not least, it must be emphasized that Curtis Mayfield influenced many Afrocentrist singers in Africa and the Caribbean, the most famous of which being without a doubt Jamaican Robert Nesta Marley, better known as Bob Marley, whose ska song "Rude Boy" (1965) borrows its chorus "I've got to keep on moving" from "Keep On Pushing."

James Brown, commonly referred to as "The Godfather of Soul" and "The King of Funk," was also evidently a pivotal force in the growth of Afrocentrism at that time, "Say It Loud – I'm Black and I'm Proud" (1968) being his most Afrocentric masterpiece:

> Say it loud: I'm black and I'm proud!
> Say it loud: I'm black and I'm proud!
>
> Some people say we've got a lot of malice
> Some say it's a lot of nerve
> But I say we won't quit moving until we get what we deserve
> We have been bucked and we have been scorned
> We have been treated bad, talked about as just bones
> But just as it takes two eyes to make a pair, ha
> Brother we can't quit until we get our share
> […]
> I worked on jobs with my feet and my hand
> But all the work I did was for the other man

> Now we demand a chance to do things for ourselves
> We're tired of beatin' our head against the wall
> And workin' for someone else
>
> Say it loud: I'm black and I'm proud!
> Say it loud: I'm black and I'm proud!

In this song, which is one of the most popular Black Power anthem of the 1960's, James Brown clearly expresses Black pride and advocates black empowerment and self-sufficiency. One of the characteristics of this song is that its call-and-response[8] chorus is performed by a group of young children responding to Brown's "Say it loud" with "I'm black and I'm proud!" Regarding this massive hit, James Brown himself said:

> it was necessary to teach pride then, and I think the song did a lot of good for a lot of people. […] [I]f you listen to it, it sounds like a children's song. That's why I had children in it, so children who heard it could grow up feeling pride. […] The song cost me a lot of my crossover audience. The racial makeup at my concerts was mostly black after that. I don't regret it […][9].

Civil rights activist Sam Cooke also took a part in promoting Black Power, particularly with "A Change Is Gonna Come" (1964), a poignant song denouncing discrimination and racism in America. When the song was released, it was immediately adopted by the black community and used as an anthem for the ongoing civil rights movement. So did Nina Simone, known as the "High Priestess of Soul," whose repertoire includes many black conscious songs, to begin with "Brown Baby" (1962), in which she clearly proclaims Black pride as the following lyrics show:

> Brown baby brown baby
> As you grow up I want you to drink from the plenty cup
> I want you to stand up tall and proud
> And I want you to speak up clear and loud
> Brown baby brown baby brown baby…

"Old Jim Crow" (1964), in which Simone reacts against the Jim Crow Laws, "Why? (The King Of Love Is Dead)" (1968), capturing the tragedy of Martin Luther King's murder, and "To be Young, Gifted and Black" (1970), inspired by Lorraine Hansberry's play with the same title, were also part of her vast militant repertoire. The latter song, which became one of the black national anthems in the United States, was covered by many black artists including Jamaican reggae stars Bob Andy and Marcia Griffiths. Politically speaking, it must be added that Nina Simone advocated violent revolution during the civil rights movement, hoping that African-Americans would be able to obtain a separate state[10]. Last but not least, she really loved Africa and was a true Pan-Africanist. Indeed, she was a close friend of South African female singer and African activist Miriam Makeba and when she died on April 21, 2003, her ashes were spread in different African countries according to her wishes.

The 1970's

The end of the African-American civil rights movement by the end of the 1960's did not put an end to burgeoning Black consciousness which had definitely been on the move. Thus, the decade of the 1970's also witnessed significant events regarding Pan-Africanism and Afrocentrism. For instance, the blaxploitation phenomenon which became famous thanks to films like *Shaft* (1971) directed by Afro-American activist Gordon Parks, *Super Fly* (1972)

directed by Gordon Parks, Jr. – Gordon Parks' son – and *Black Caesar* (1973) by Larry Cohen.

Blaxploitation films primarily starred black actors and were the first to feature soundtracks of soul and funk music. Indeed, *Super Fly*'s imaginative and funky soundtrack was realized by Curtis Mayfield himself while the soundtracks of *Shaft* and *Black Caesar* were respectively done by Isaac Hayes aka "Black Moses"[11] and the great James Brown. Despite to the fact that some black intellectuals and organizations, including the NAACP, the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC) and the National Urban League (NUL)[12], argued that such movies did not convey a good image of Blacks, mostly depicting them as pimps, drug dealers or hit men, blaxploitation to some extent has had positive repercussions on the African-Americans' life. Indeed, firstly, it enabled black culture and black actors, film directors and musicians to be in the limelight in a white-dominated society. Secondly, it allowed to give rise to black stars, a status almost exclusively reserved for white people until then, contributing in a sense to Black pride. Thirdly, from a financial point of view, it enabled Blacks to make lots of money in a White-controlled business; and the money earned could then serve the African-American community's interests. For example, Isaac Hayes did a lot of charitable works and gave large amounts of money to various organizations dedicated to the black cause, something he probably could not have achieved without the celebrity and the funds earned through blaxploitation. Among other things, he was an Ambassador for the World Literacy Crusade and the Shepherd Foundation, a Harlem-based charity which researches alternative treatments for degenerative diseases. He also established the Isaac Hayes Foundation[13] in 1999 to assist vulnerable populations in realizing their full potential via grants, technical assistance and program development in the fields of health care, economic, community, environmental and human development. Finally, in 1992, Isaac Hayes was crowned an honorary king of Ghana's Ada district in honour of his work supporting literacy; in this West African country, he also opened a school designed to link African children with American children via the Internet. Fourthly, and lastly, blaxploitation has clearly changed the face of American popular culture inspiring major film directors such as Spike Lee – see *Do The Right Thing* (1989), *Malcolm X* (1992) –; John Singleton – see *Boyz 'N The Hood* (1991), *Shaft* (2000) –; Quentin Tarantino – see *Pulp Fiction* (1994), *Jackie Brown* (1997), *Kill Bill* (2003) – and Ridley Scott – see *American Gangster* (2007) –, just to name a few. Blaxploitation has also influenced many outstanding African-American singers, among which gangsta rapper Snoop Dogg – listen to "Doggy Dogg World" (1994) –; Ice-T – listen to the *Rhyme Pays* album (1987) – and Big Daddy Kane – listen to Public Enemy's song "Burn Hollywood Burn" (1990) in which guest rapper Big Daddy Kane denounces the abandonment of black culture by Hollywood saying "I got Black Caesar back at the crib."

During the 1970's, other musical events conveyed Afrocentric connotations. This is the case of the large-scale concert organized by Stax Records on 20 August 1972, in Los Angeles, in commemoration of the seventh birthday of the Watts riots. Most of Stax Records artists outstandingly performed, including Rufus Thomas, Eddie Floyd, The Bar-Kays, Albert King, The Staples Singers – best known for their classic soul song "Respect Yourself" (1971) – and Isaac Hayes. The popular appeal and the wide diversity of the attending Stax Records artists ensured its uniqueness and success. 100, 000 people attended what came to be known as "Wattstax"or the "black Woodstock," celebrating Black pride and optimism. Several LP's and a documentary film immortalized this wonderful concert.

When, in 1974, James Brown toured Africa and performed in Zaire – present-day Democratic Republic of Congo – as part of the Rumble in the Jungle boxing fight between Muhammad

Ali and George Foreman, this musical event also powerfully contributed to uplift black culture and above all to build a bridge between African-Americans and Africans.

The Last Poets, a group of poets and musicians who emerged in the late 1960's and who are often cited as pioneers of hip-hop, also played a part in developing Afrocentrism. Among their distinctive features, one must know that the musicians of the group were actually African drums' players and all Last Poets wore traditional African clothes. Afrocentrism was also apparent through their respective name bearing Islamic and African connotations – Jalal Mansur Nuriddin, Umar Bin Hassan, Abiodun Oyewole and Nilaja – and of course through their lyrics as shown in the following ones taken from "Niggaz Are Scared Of Revolution" (1970):

> Niggers are scared of revolution
> But niggers shouldn't be scared of revolution
> Because revolution is nothing but change
> And all niggers do is change
>
> Niggers come in from work and change into pimping clothes
> And hit the streets to make some quick change
>
> Niggers change their hair from black to red to blond
> And hope like hell their looks will change
>
> Niggers kill other niggers
> Just because one didn't receive the correct change
>
> Niggers change from men to women, from women to men
> Niggers change, change, change
>
> […]
>
> Niggers always goin' through bullshit change
> But when it comes for real change
> Niggers are scared of revolution…

The Last Poets recorded seven albums in the 1970's, each of them conveying strong Afrocentric messages. Then, in the 1980's and 1990's, they collaborated with many rappers who often saw them as the grandfathers of rap.

Finally, Marvin Gaye's successful albums *What's Going On* (1971) and *Let's Get It On* (1973) are regarded by many as among the finest protest albums ever recorded, especially the first one, and they have strongly influenced modern rhythm and blues and soul African-American productions.

The 1980's

As it is stipulated in the first part of this paper, Afrocentrism gained importance during the 1980's as African-Americans felt alienated from Ronald Reagan's conservative revolution. Thus, numerous black artists, particularly burgeoning hip-hop and rap artists, embraced Pan-African and Afrocentric ideologies during that period. But before mentioning them, it is important to refer to Afrika Bambaataa.

Since the beginning of his musical career in the early 1970's, Afro-American DJ Afrika Bambaataa[14], regarded as a pioneer of hip-hop along with The Last Poets, DJ Kool Herc[15] and

Grandmaster Flash[16], has always been an active Afrocentrist paying tribute to the African-American community as well as Africa. It must be highlighted that he adopted his name after his return from a trip to Africa in the late 1970's. He was inspired by Zulu chief Bambata[17] who led an armed rebellion in early twentieth-century South Africa. Afrika Bambaataa was also influenced by another Zulu chief, fierce warrior Shaka Zulu who is said to have ruled the Zulu kingdom in early eighteen-century South Africa[18]. Among Afrika Bambaataa's main accomplishments is the foundation of the Universal Zulu Nation in 1973, an organization originally dedicated to fight gangs in New York; in the early 1980's, its key goals have become the promotion of peace, unity and above all hip-hop culture – dance, rap, graffiti and deejaying. Afrika Bambaataa is also responsible for having spread rap and hip-hop culture throughout the world. His 1982 song "Planet Rock" is generally seen as one of the earliest and most influential rap songs. Moreover, in 1982, he and his followers – dancers, graffiti artist, DJs – went outside the United States on the first hip-hop tour, influencing plenty overseas artists such as French rapper MC Solaar[19]. It is to be noted that Afrika Bambaataa often wears traditional African clothes and hat, thus proclaiming his Africanness. On the official website of the Universal Zulu Nation, one can see the "biographies on people who are [black] thinkers, fighters, or straight up controversial"[20] such as Minister Louis Farrakhan, Cheikh Anta Diop, Marcus Mosiah Garvey and Dr. Khalid Abdul Muhammad – former leader of both the Black Muslim Movement and the New Black Panther Party for Self Defense –, among others, which gives us a general idea of how Afrocentric Afrika Bambaataa and the members of his organization are.

Africa Bambaataa has influenced a great number of conscious hip-hop artists such as De La Soul, A Tribe Called Quest, Queen Latifah, Mos Def and Common among many others. All these African-American artists have criticized racism through their music and looked towards Africa so as to create their own identities and styles. For example, Queen Latifah said: "To me Afrocentricity is a way of living…It's about being into yourself and into your people and being proud of your origins."[21] Robin Roberts confirms the female singer's sayings:

> Queen Latifah's style and dress and rap itself are Afrocentric; through them she looks to Africa for inspiration. Queen Latifah's Afrocentricity operates both culturally and politically. Her legal bearing, her name, and her self-promotion associate her with a tradition of African royalty. Through her attire, she draws attention to styles and colors that are African in their ethos[22].

Her first album *All Hail The Queen*, released in 1989, was an immediate success boosted by the two singles "Wrath of My Madness" and "Ladies Night" – featuring Monie Love –, the feminist anthem that remains one of Queen Latifah's signature songs. It must be underlined that on the cover of the album, she stands proudly wearing an African-like black turban around her head. There is also a map of Africa – entirely black – encircled by her name written in red letters and the title of the album in green letters, the black, red and green colors obviously evoking the UNIA's colors.

Among the other 1980's rappers influenced by Afrocentric and pro-Black ideologies, it is also crucial to mention two of the best and most radical hip-hop bands ever to have existed in the whole world, Public Enemy (PE) – formed in Long Island, New York, in the mid-1980's – and Niggaz With Attitude also known as NWA – formed in Compton, California, in the late 1980's. Indeed, Public Enemy, composed of Chuck D., Flavor Flav, Professor Griff and Terminator X among others, is well-known for its politically charged lyrics denouncing the white Establishment and in favor of the African-American community. This statement is confirmed by the second and third albums of the group, *It Takes A Nation O Millions To Hold*

Us Back (1988) and *Fear Of A Black Planet* (1990). The second studio album of PE was extremely influential and often described as the group's magnum opus. The lyrics taken from the song "Black Steel In The Hour Of Chaos," have a strong political focus and give us a good idea of the atmosphere of the album:

> I got a letter from the government
> The other day
> I opened and read it
> It said they were suckers
> They wanted me for their army or whatever
> Picture me given a damn – I said never
> Here is a land that never gave a damn
> About a brother like me and myself
> […]
> It occurred to me
> The suckers had authority
> Cold sweatin as I dwell in my cell
> How long has it been?
> […]
> Four of us packed in a cell like slaves – oh well
> The same motherfucker got us livin in his hell
> You have to realize –what it's a form of slavery
> Organized under a swarm of devils…

The above lyrics deal with a fictional story surrounding the Vietnam war. Besides denouncing the war, PE clearly criticizes American society which is depicted as racist towards black people. The group violently condemns the treatment of Blacks by American society. Despite a controversy about alleged anti-Semitic comments by Professor Griff, *Fear Of A Black Planet* was very positively welcomed by rap fans as well as the specialized press when it was released in March 1990; it was even seen by some critics as better than the previous album. Among its reference titles, one must mention "Anti-Nigger Machine," denouncing again American society in general as well as police; "Burn Hollywood Burn," criticizing the fact that Hollywood almost always conveys a very negative image of black people through its movies, often depicting them as maids or clownish, dumb and uncivilized people; "Power To The People," dealing with Black unity; and "Fight The Power" which noticeably conveys a feeling of Black pride:

> Elvis was a hero to most
> But he never meant shit to me you see
> Straight up racist that sucker was
> Simple and plain
> Mother fuck him and John Wayne
> 'Cause I'm black and I'm proud
> I'm ready and hyped plus I'm amped
> Most of my heroes don't appear on no stamps
> Sample a look back you look and find
> Nothing but rednecks for 400 years if you check…

Like PE, NWA, composed of Dr. Dre, Ice Cube and Eazy-E among others, expressed an attitude of resistance against white supremacists as well as "house niggers," namely black people who do their best to please white people even if it means disowning their own identity and character. The group was so controversial that he was at some points banned from many mainstream US radio stations and prevented from touring in the US. Last but not least, FBI officials even asked the band to stop releasing their hardcore rap music, what they obviously refused to do, putting forward their freedom of speech and expression. "Fuck Tha Police"

(1988) is without a doubt NWA's most notorious hit. In this song, NWA violently protests against police brutality and racial profiling.

Finally, we can not conclude this 1980's part without mentioning "We Are The World," (1985) the song written by Michael Jackson and Lionel Ritchie, produced by Quincy Jones and recorded by a big group of famous artists – most of them being Afro-Americans –, among which Michael Jackson, Lionel Ritchie, Harry Belafonte, Ray Charles, Al Jarreau, Smokey Robinson, Tina Turner and Stevie Wonder. The charity single was intended to raise money for famine relief in Ethiopia. The 800, 000 copies which arrived in stores were sold in just a few days.

The 1990's and the early 2000's

During the 1990's and the early 2000's, Afrocentrism did not vanish from African-American music. Instead, it has kept growing with the arrival of new talented singers, still inspired by the militant Afro-American artists and personalities of the preceding years/ decades.

One of the most famous Afrocentric groups of the early 1990's is unquestionably Arrested Development, founded by Speech and Headliner, who won a Grammy Award in 1992 with its masterpiece *3 Year, 5 Months & 2 Days in the Life of...* The same year, the *Rolling Stone* magazine also named Arrested Development the band of the year. Moreover, on the *Rolling Stone* website, one can read:

> Arrested Development's 1992 debut, *3 Year, 5 Months & 2 Days in the Life of...*, forged an affinity with African American cultural history. It wasn't a safe commercial bet, but the album became popular by revealing the essence of that history in contemporary regionalism ("Tennessee"), sexual politics ("Natural," "People Everyday") and social outlook ("Mr. Wendal")[23].

The album's title refers to the length of time it took to the group to sign a contract with a records label. Its reference songs are those mentioned by the *Rolling Stone*'s review. These titles mainly deal with Africanness – African clothes, African natural hair, the beauty of African women etc.–, Black unity and racism. For example, in the following song called "Natural," the group pays tribute to the natural beauty of African women, indirectly condemning relaxed hair and similar artifices:

> Your beauty is endless and I'm hoping to explore
> Brothers may say you're ugly but I disagree
> But in a way that's fine with me
> 'Cause I want to travel with you
> Travel in your mind 'cause you seem like a virgin
> Free as the wind blows, tall as a tree grows
> Wild like nature, yet calm as a field
> Hair is natural, lips are natural…

Arrested development influenced a wide range of Afro-American artists such as The Roots, The Fugees and Erykah Badu among others. The Roots was formed in Philadelphia in the late 1980's, but the group recorded its first album, *Organix*, in 1993. Through its music which could be labelled as alternative/ experimental hip-hop – it is also sometimes labelled as neo-soul –, The Roots makes numerous references to Africa and support Afrocentric principles.

The Fugees, whose name derives from the term "refugee," was formed in the early 1990's by Haitian-Americans Wyclef Jean and Pras Michel and African-American Lauryn Hill. The Fugees recorded two albums before disbanded in 1997. *The Score* (1996) is without a doubt its masterpiece and is one of the biggest-selling hip-hop albums of all time. Through its music labelled as neo-soul mixing elements of hip-hop, reggae and soul, the trio largely paid tribute to African and Caribbean cultures. Since the band broke up, the three former members of The Fugees have also greatly contributed to support Africa and the Diaspora in their personal lives. For example, Lauryn Hill, who has embraced the Rastafari religion and who has children with one of Bob Marley's son, is known for taking part in well-building projects in Kenya and Uganda. Wyclef Jean established, in 2005, the Yéle Haiti foundation[24], which among other things has since provided scholarships to thousands of poor Haitian children. As for Pras Michel, he launched, in 2007, prAsperity project[25], a non-profit organization trying to erase homelessness in the United States, especially homelessness among the African-American community.

Erykah Badu, born Erica Abi Wright, changed the spelling of her forename from "Erica" to "Erykah," believing "Erica" to be her slave name; "kah" would bear a special meaning in Arabic. "Badu" is also an African name, meaning "tenth born child"[26] to Ashanti people (Ghana). Erykah Badu is known as much for her role in the emergence of neo-soul – along with The Roots and The Fugees among others – as for her taste for flashy and colourful traditional African clothing and headscarves. Her first album, *Baduizm* (1997), was highly acclaimed and established Badu as a singer returning to the simplicity of early-1970's soul music. Her second album, *Mama's Gun* (2000), also met great success, and was slightly more politically committed than the first one. Thematically speaking, it deals with topics such as police brutality towards Blacks – listen to "A.D. 2000" – and relationship breakdowns – listen to "Green Eyes." Among other things, Erykah Badu launched a charity organization in 1997, Beautiful Love Incorporated Non Profit Development (B.L.I.N.D), which provides community-driven development for inner-city youth through music, dance, theatre and visual arts.

Many other 1990's-2000's Afro-American singers recognize themselves through Afrocentric ideologies, accordingly conveying such messages through their music/ lifestyles. Among them, can be mentioned Common – former Erykah Badu's boy friend –, Wu-Tang Clan, Mos Def and again Queen Latifah who, in 1993, released her most successful album up to today entitled *Black Reign*. The title of Queen Latifah's third album speaks for itself.

Conclusion

Thus, the civil rights movements of the 1960's incontestably increased Black consciousness among American black people, by the way boosting Black Power, Black Nationalism, Pan-Africanism and Afrocentrism, namely ideologies intrinsically linked to each other which emphasize the importance of black people culturally, philosophically and historically speaking. More and more Black Americans, who gradually referred to themselves as African-Americans, have felt concerned with Afrocentric views, from the common men to politicians, via churchmen, actors and musicians. Indeed, music, which is in integral part of Black culture, has not been spared Afrocentrism. In a White-centered society, African-American musicians and singers have used their own music – characterized by elements of traditional African music such as social commentary, call-and-response, exciting rhythms and soulful melodies – as well as their own image – as public personalities – to express their support to Afrocentric

principles, Curtis Mayfield, James Brown, Isaac Hayes, Afrika Bambaataa, Public Enemy, Queen Latifah, The Fugees and Erykah Badu, among many others, perfectly exemplifying it. Undeniably this phenomenon is part of "the fundamental attitude of resistance,"[27] dating back to slavery.

Notes

[1] See Cheikh Anta Diop, *The African Origin of Civilization: Myth or Reality* (Chicago: Lawrence Hill Books, 1974).

[2] Giulia Bonacci, *Pionniers et héritiers. Histoire du retour, des Caraïbes à l'Éthiopie (19ème et 20ème siècles)*, Ph.D. Dissertation (Paris: École des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales/ School for Advanced Studies in Social Sciences, 2007), 77.

[3] Jérémie Kroubo Dagnini, "Marcus Garvey: A controversial Figure in the History of Pan-Africanism," in *The Journal of Pan African Studies*, vol.2, n°3, March 2008, 198.

[4] OAU was established on 25 May 1963 with the aim of promoting the unity and solidarity of African states and eradicating all forms of colonialism among other things. It was disbanded in 2002, replaced by the African Union (AU).

[5] See Molefi Kete Asante, *The Afrocentric Idea* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1998); Molefi Kete Asante, *Afrocentricity : The Theory of Social Change* (Sauk Village, Illinois: African American Images, 2003).

[6] In "The emergence of the Term "African American" at Two Prestigious Institutions: *The New York Times* and the Supreme Court," in *The Journal of Blacks in Higher Education*, n°16, Summer 1997, 12.

[7] Steve Barrow and Peter Dalton, *The Rough Guide to Reggae* (London: Rough Guides, 2004) 62.

[8] It is to be noted that the alternation between leader and chorus, often called "call-and-response," is typical of African music and is an important element of African-American music too. Among other things, call-and-response involves the audience, transcending the separation of audience and performers so common in the West. According to African people, music is participatory in nature, it is not meant to be watched from afar.

[9] James Brown in James Brown and Bruce Tucker, *James Brown: The Godfather of Soul. An Autobiography* (New York: Macmillan Publishing Company, 1986) 200.

[10] See the documentary *Nina Simone, La légende*, dir. Frank Lords, NBC (Quantum Leap), 1992.

[11] This nickname comes from the title of a double album he released in 1971 on Stax Records' label. The *Black Moses* album was one of his most personal and accomplished works, symbolising Black pride par excellence.

[12] It must be stressed that though these organizations were pro-Blacks, they were known as promoting integration, if not assimilation, instead of separatism like Marcus Garvey's UNIA, the Nation of Islam or the Black Panthers. In other words, they were much less radical than the latter Afrocentric organizations.

[13] See *Isaac Hayes Foundation*, 2008, <http://www.isaachayes.com/charity/index.html> (page consulted on 30 August 2008).

[14] He is of West Indian descent.

[15] Originating from Jamaica.

[16] Originating from Barbados.

[17] Bambata is often credited as being a precursor of the anti-apartheid movement in South Africa. See James Stuart, *A History of the Zulu Rebellion 1906, and of Dinuzulu's Arrest, Trial and Expatriation* (New York: Negro Universities Press, 1969).

[18] See E. A. Ritter, *Shaka Zulu* (London: Longmans, Green, 1955).

[19] MC Solaar was born in Senegal from Chad parents.

[20] See *Universal Zulu Nation*, <http://www.zulunation.com/BIOGRAPHIES.html> (page consulted on 31 August 2008).

[21] Chris Dafoe, "Rapping Latifah Rules New Tribes," in *Toronto Star*, 18 May 1990, 8.

[22] Robin Roberts, ""Ladies First": Queen Latifah's Afrocentric Feminist Music Video," in *African American Review*, Summer 1994, 246.

[23] Armond White, "Arrested Development: Zingalamaduni," in *Rolling Stone*, 30 June 1994, <http://www.rollingstone.com/reviews/album/267987/review/5942477/zingalamaduni> (page consulted on 1 September 2008).

[24] See *Yélehaiti*, 2006, <http://www.yele.org/> (page consulted on 1 September 2008).

[25] See *prAsperity project*, <http://prasperity.com> (page consulted on 1 September 2008).

[26] Samuel Gyasi Obeng, *African Anthroponymy* (Munich: Lincom Europa, 2001) 39.

[27] Angela Nelson, "Rap Music and the Stagolee Mythoform," in *Americana: The Journal of American Popular Culture (1900-present)*, vol.4, issue 1, Spring 2005, <http://americanpopularculture.com/journal/articles/spring_2005/nelson.htm> (page consulted on 1 September 2008).

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