An Exploration of the Culture, Playing Style, and Performance Practices of the Marching Percussion Sections of Historically Black Colleges and Universities

Derrick Greene

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AN EXPLORATION OF THE CULTURE, PLAYING STYLE, AND PERFORMANCE PRACTICES OF THE MARCHING PERCUSSION SECTIONS OF HISTORICALLY BLACK COLLEGES AND UNIVERSITIES

by

Derrick Alexander Greene Jr.

A Document
Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements for the Degree of
Doctor of Musical Arts

Major: Music

The University of Memphis
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Acknowledgments

First, I would like to thank God for allowing me to get to this point and allowing things that I could barely imagine to unfold in front of my eyes. I would also like to thank my wife Brenda who has supported me and motivated me to “see it through”. To my mother, family, friends, students, and last but certainly not least, my teachers at the University of Memphis, I am forever grateful for all of the support, inspiration, and encouragement that you have given me throughout this process.
Abstract

This document will focus on traditional-style marching percussion. This style of marching percussion is normally found at HBCU and predominantly black high schools although there are some exceptions in which a Black band director at a predominately white high school chooses to model his program in the traditional style. With that being said, the purpose of this document is to explore the culture of HBCU drumlines, their musical preparation, performance practice and provide a guide as to how to successfully implement these practices. This document is meant to serve as a guide to both those who wish to start a traditional-style drumline as well as those who are already overseeing a traditional-style drumline. This guide will cover things such as equipment selection, playing styles and techniques, performance practice, recruiting, tuning, and composition style. It is my goal that any reader of this document will have a strong understanding of how a traditional style drumline should function both alone and with the marching band.

Findings of this study were that lines that have a more corps-style approach have teachers that either marched in a Drum Corps International ensemble or in a high school marching band that was modeled after one. These schools are also in areas where there are not many high schools that practice traditional style marching percussion such as the case of Virginia State University. Meanwhile, HBCUs in the midsouth feature an approach much like an aggressive, groove-centered approach that is the same at both the collegiate and high school levels due to the students continuing their education at schools with marching bands that suit their interests. No matter the region, drumlines at these
HBCUs take these past experiences and combine them with dance moves and grooves to accomplish their main goal of entertaining their audience rather than adjudication.
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Chapter 1

Introduction

Popularized by the 2001 movie *Drumline* directed by Charles Stone III, the culture of marching bands belonging to Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) is one unlike any other. Modeled initially after bands from Predominately White Institutions (PWIs), directors of each HBCU program have taken those models and given them their own style from the look of their uniforms to their performance practice. The HBCU marching band world is one full of song arrangements, brilliant choreography, and countless field effects. Going further, the area of marching percussion is a multimillion-dollar business with books, camps, and other programs dedicated to learning about it. However, I would like to submit that most of these programs only tell half of the story. This document will focus on the other half which is traditional-style marching percussion. This style of marching percussion is normally found at HBCU and predominantly black high schools although there are some exceptions in which a Black band director at a predominately white high school chooses to model his program in the traditional style. After presenting the attributes and practices of these ensembles, the intent will then be to serve as a guide as to how to successfully implement these practices. This guide will cover things such as equipment selection, playing styles and techniques, performance practice, recruiting, tuning, and composition style. Furthermore, it is my goal that any reader of this document will have a strong understanding of how a traditional style drumline should function both alone and with the marching band.
The Drumline

Before we can discuss how a traditional-style drumline functions, we must first determine what a drumline is. For the sake of this research, I have defined the traditional-style drumline as the marching percussion section in a marching band that is usually comprised of bass drums, tenor drums whether single tenors, multi-tenors or both, snare drums, cymbals at an HBCU whereas, corps-style marching percussion refers to marching percussion at PWIs. Most modern sections, whether traditional or corps-style, the instrumentation listed above. In some marching programs, specifically corps-style programs, the battery is only half of the marching percussion section as there is another half called the front ensemble or “pit” which is comprised of keyboard percussion instruments, sometimes timpani, concert bass drums, gongs, a drum kit, and other small percussion instruments. However, these ensembles have not always looked this way.

In The Modern Marching Band, author Jack Lee gives the instrumentation of what was considered a “modern” marching percussion section in the early to mid-twentieth century. These instruments are the snare drum, single tenor drum, bass drum, and crash cymbals. These drums were carried via slings and stabilized with a leg rest or as Lee states, “strapped to the leg with a leather thong”. Over the years many band programs have evolved this instrumentation to include multi-toms in configurations of four, five or even six drums instead of the single tenor drum, a tonal bass drum section which features bass drums of different sizes and each tuned to a different pitch as opposed to unison bass drums. Yet, there are a few that have kept this “traditional”

2 Ibid 186-188.
instrumentation such as Southern University’s Funk Factory and Talladega Colleges’ Renegade Rebels. Other traditional-style drum lines such as Jackson State University’s War and Thunder and Prairie View Agricultural and Mechanical University’s M.S.D. have adjusted instrumentation that includes multi-toms but still have unison basses. There are drumlines that have evolved their instrumentation further by adding tonal bass drums as well as multi-toms. Teddy Hall who has taught at HBCUs such as Alabama State University and Tennessee State University, calls the instrumentation that includes multi-toms a “hybrid makeup” meaning that these lines have taken the instrumentation that has traditionally been present and adapted the new trends in battery instrumentation to fit their needs as a drum line. According to Hall, the multi-toms add color to the groove being presented by the other instruments.

There are HBCU drumlines that have kept the traditional style instrumentation that Jack Lee describes which are Southern University, Talladega College, and Paine College. Moreover, there are HBCUs that have kept Lee’s described instrumentation but added multi-toms. These HBCUs are located in Alabama, Arkansas, Georgia, Mississippi, Oklahoma, Tennessee and Texas as shown in the table below.

Table 1 Showing drumlines that have kept Jack Lee’s described instrumentation and those who have only added multi-toms.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>HBCUs that have kept Jack Lee’s instrumentation</th>
<th>HBCUs that have kept Jack Lee’s instrumentation but added multi-toms</th>
<th>HBCUs that have kept Jack Lee’s instrumentation but added multi-toms contd.</th>
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<tr>
<td>Paine College</td>
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<td>Lemoyne Owen college</td>
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<td>Southern University</td>
<td>Alabama State University</td>
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<tr>
<td>Talladega College</td>
<td>Arkansas Baptist College</td>
<td>Morehouse University</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Coahoma Community College</td>
<td>Morris Brown College</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Concordia College</td>
<td>Prairie View A&amp;M University</td>
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Teddy Hall, interviewed by author, via zoom, September 28, 2021.
Table 1 Continued showing drumlines that have kept Jack Lee’s described instrumentation and those who have only added multi-tenors.

<table>
<thead>
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<th>HBCUs that have kept Jack Lee’s instrumentation but added multi-toms contd.</th>
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<td>Fort Valley State University</td>
<td>Stillman College</td>
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<tr>
<td>Jackson State University</td>
<td>Tennessee State University</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Langston University</td>
<td>Texas Southern University</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lane college</td>
<td>The University of Arkansas at Pine Bluff</td>
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<tr>
<td>Miles College</td>
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**SWAC Style**

The colleges and universities in the who play in the Southwestern Athletic Conference (SWAC) style exhibit a “groovy, dark and funky” style of playing referring to the part construction and drum-set imitation according to Vincent Smith, Instructor of Percussion at Lane College, and Whitehaven High School. The term dark is referring to the drum tuning that these sections use that we will discuss later in this chapter. When researching these drumlines, elements that stand out are rhythmic hocketing and contrapuntal compositions. According to my research, these drumlines rely on call and response rhythms or hockets when crafting the single tenor and bass drum parts. These parts combine to make one fundamental groove which serves as the foundation of the cadence. Meanwhile, the cymbals, multi-toms, and snare drums layer independent lines on top of each other resulting in a contrapuntal piece of music. I have also observed occasions where there is hocketing between the entire section. This may be in the form of

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4 Vince Smith, interviewed by author, via zoom, September 8, 2021.
a triplet drum fill. Examples of this can be seen from both Jackson State’s War and Thunder in their drumline battle with Southern University’s Funk Factory in 2021. An issue that I have observed with this compositional style is that there is a high risk of part cluttering especially if dynamics are not employed between the different lines. Drumlines that I have observed play in this style include drumlines belonging to HBCU that are members of the SWAC conference such as: Alabama Agricultural and Mechanical University, Alabama State University, Alcorn State University, Jackson State University, Mississippi Valley State University, University of Arkansas at Pine Bluff, Texas Southern University, Southern University, Grambling State University and Prairie View Agricultural and Mechanical University. Other drumlines that I have observed play in the SWAC style but are not member of the SWAC conference are: Tennessee State University, Lane College, Lemoyne-Owen College, Concordia College, Miles College, Stillman College, Talladega College, Tuskegee University, Coahoma Community College, Rust College, Arkansas Baptist College, Langston University, Fort Valley State University, Morehouse University, Morris Brown College, Paine College.

**MEAC Style**

Conversely, another group of HBCU drumlines have a different sound. These drumlines often feature a drum-corps approach that has become synonymous with the Mid-Eastern Athletic Conference (MEAC) but include many universities who have conference affiliations outside of the MEAC according to Professor Hall. Their instrumentation almost matches that of drumlines found in the SWAC style drumlines,

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6 Teddy Hall, interviewed by author, via zoom, September 28, 2021.
but they have tonal basses instead of unison bases. For example, the instrumentation found with Hampton University’s “Sticky Situation” almost matches the instrumentation found with Jackson State University’s “War and Thunder”. In certain cases, like Florida Agricultural and Mechanical University, both tonal and scotch basses are used. These scotch bass drums feature a shallow ten-inch-wide shell as opposed to the fourteen-inch-wide shell seen with traditional marching bass drums. This shallow shell takes away some of the drum’s resonance without affecting the attack of the head.

Drumlines who play in this style include tend to be HBCU drumlines in the MEAC and Central Intercollegiate Athletic Association (CIAA) conferences, Albany State University, Allen University, Bethune-Cookman University, Benedict College, Central State University, Cheyney University, Clark Atlanta University, Edward Waters College, Florida Agricultural and Mechanical University, Hampton University, North Carolina Agricultural and Technical University, Oakwood University, and Savannah State University.

I have also observed that the compositional style of drumlines in the MEAC style feature the same rhythmic hocketing between the tenor drums and bass drums as with the SWAC style. One key difference that I have observed of MEAC style drumlines is their use of rhythmic homophony, meaning that although all of the drums may be playing at the same time, that each rhythmic line coincides with one another whether its accents

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from the cymbals or a doubled rhythm between two or more sub-sections within the
drumline. This doubling of rhythmic figures reduces the risk of cluttering of parts.

One interesting find was that one of the larger HBCUs in Texas, Prairie View
A&M University, combines both compositional styles found Both SWAC and MEAC
style drumlines while sharing the same instrumentation as the drumlines with which they
share a conference. When I interviewed Lamon Lawhorn, director of percussion and
assistant band director at North Carolina Agricultural and Technical State University, he
recalls his experiences as a member of the Prairie View A&M University drumline
known then as the McFunk Box.9 When describing their style, Lawhorn states that most
of the cadences were conversational between the tenor and bass drums, and based on
some type of groove which is one of the main features of SWAC style marching
percussion writing.10 Conversely, the snare, cymbal, and multi-tenor writing, as observed
by this researcher, are layered in a homophonic manner much like the writing style found
in MEAC style drumlines.11

This theory is one that can also be applied to HBCUs in regions of the country. In
an interview with Elisha Powell, drumline instructor for Virginia State’s Drum-Phi,
Powell states that before he arrived at Virginia State for his undergraduate studies, his
only exposure to marching percussion was what he saw from the drum corps while he
was in high school. He also states that most of the MEAC style HBCUs play in their
hybrid style because of this same reason.12 This theory is supported by Pedro Orey,
assistant band director, and drumline instructor for Bethune Cookman University, who in

9 Lamon Lawhorn, interviewed by author, via zoom, November 22, 2021.
10 Ibid.
11 Ibid.
12 Elisha Powell, interviewed by author, via zoom, January 6th, 2022.
our interview discussed his corps-style training that he gained during his undergraduate studies at Mississippi Valley State University, an HBCU that has since converted to traditional-style.\textsuperscript{13}

With so much blending of instruments and playing styles one must ask; where, if any exists, is the line between traditional style drumming and that seen in the drum corps and programs influenced by their playing? Teddy Hall suggests that the dividing line is in the material and purpose behind the groups.\textsuperscript{14} Hall states that the purpose of the traditional-style drum line is meant to entertain the audiences therefore, they will not deviate too much from the drum set part of the top-40 songs in which they are playing with the band.\textsuperscript{15} It is possible that the change in percussion accompaniment could detract from the recognizability of the song. On the other hand, Hall states that drum corps percussion aims to be competitive. This rationale can be seen every summer as world-class drum corps compete against each other every summer in different events culminating in the Drum Corps International finals that are held in Indianapolis, Indiana.\textsuperscript{16} Due to their competitive nature, DCI percussion arrangers focus less on groove and instead arrange their battery parts to highlight the melodic movement of the music that they are playing.\textsuperscript{17}

It also seems true that HBCUs with an established tradition also influence the traditions of their area high schools. This conclusion is supported as some university percussion instructors such as Vincent Smith, are hired to work with local high school

\textsuperscript{13} Pedro Orey, interviewed by author, via zoom, December 8\textsuperscript{th}, 2021.
\textsuperscript{14} Teddy Hall, interviewed by author, via zoom, September 28, 2021.
\textsuperscript{15} Teddy Hall, interviewed by author, via zoom, September 28, 2021.
\textsuperscript{17} Teddy Hall, interviewed by author, via zoom, September 28, 2021.
marching programs, giving their students a first-hand encounter with the performance practice of that collegiate drumline through their instructor. An example of the HBCU drumline’s influence on local high school students can be seen below as traditional-style drumlines in Memphis closely resemble university drumlines such as: War and Thunder, The Authority. Alcorn State University’s Tower of Power and Mississippi Valley State University’s S.O.U.L. Section as seen in figure 1.1. There are a few other similarities between the high school drumline and collegiate drumline. For example the use of the same drum heads. Also if you focus on the drumsticks you can see both drumlines practice stick taping which will be discussed later in this document. Finally, you can notice the angle of the drums are similar in each of these images. This can lead us to believe there is validity in the claim of performance practice having a tickle-down effect from the college level to the high school and middle school levels.

Figure 1.1 Showing the similarities between traditional style high school and college drumlines. Shown from left to right are: “Tower of Power” of Alcorn State University, “S.O.U.L. Section” of Mississippi Valley State University, Whitehaven High School Drumline, Central High School Drumline, and “War and Thunder” of Jackson State University.
Culture

Traditional-style drum line culture and performance practice is based around the need to keep the traditional elements of that section or school alive. These traditions can span any aspect of marching band activities such as dress, playing style, instruments/implements used, the way material is written, what material is played and how an ensemble behaves. Some traditions are common of most traditional-style drumlines such as militaristic discipline and movement. Furthermore, many of these ensembles have kept the instrumentation of early Big Ten conference marching bands or in certain cases, adjusted instrumentation based on necessity. One of these ensembles is Grambling State University’s (GSU) Chocolate Thunder. According to their percussion instructor Mr. Ricardo Davis, their use of a thirty-six-inch bass drum called “Big Mac” was originally a product of necessity for the GSU band program due to their lack of bass drums in the early years of their program. In those early years, they would leave “Big Mac” on the fifty-yard line to serve as a metronome for the band during the drill portion of their show.

One main aspect of tradition unique for drumlines is their name. Most traditional-style drumlines have a unique name they are referred to within their band as well as the HBCU band community. These names serve both as a point of pride for the past and present ensemble members. as well as a tool for branding and marketing to potential

20 Ibid.
students. Drumlines are not the only entities within the band to have a name for their section. Most marching bands have a name in which they use for branding such as the Music City Sound of Fisk University or Ohio State University’s Best Damn Band in the Land.

One important element that should be considered when naming a drumline is if the name will unify the section and encourage cohesion. Names that are do not promote unity tend to cause the exact opposite which is the division of the section between those that are considered a part of the section and those that are not. Furthermore, the opportunity for hazing or other mischief to new members of a section arises without proper guidance and parameters. Examples of this can be seen with sections that have had to change their name such as Tennessee State University’s The Authority formerly known as The Rat Patrol. This name change came because its current instructors Professor Derrick Greene and Mr. Kyron Potts felt it was associated with years of mischief within the band program.

As a student at Tennessee State University, I have seen that there are also traditions that hold no validity other than that one person or group of people began doing things a certain way and continued to oversee that their method of doing things would not be changed throughout the years. While this can lead to the stagnation of growth within ensembles, it also leads to ensembles protecting their musical identity. As a drumline instructor, I strongly believe that this is extremely important as ensembles try to remain culturally and musically relevant because these traditional practices serve as grounding elements to keep drum lines from straying too far from their respective traditions. If

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21 Pedro Orey, interviewed by author, via zoom, December 8, 2021.
22 Pedro Orey, interviewed by author, via zoom, December 8, 2021.
allowed to stray too far from their traditions, ensembles run the risk of sounding like one another. This researcher believes that traditional-style drum lines should venture as far as their traditional elements will allow them to go without sacrificing their look and sound. That is not to say that drumline instructors should not seek to innovate; however, they should take great care to maintain their musical identity. Due to the various approaches to tuning, drumhead choice, writing styles and note interpretation explored in the following chapters, drumlines should be able to play the same written material but have a unique sound.

Chapter 2

Drumheads

Snare drumheads for traditional style drumlines come in various sizes with drumheads as large as fifteen inches being used by FAMU.1 One of the most popular drumheads, primarily with drumlines that play in the SWAC style, is the Powerstroke 77. This is a mylar drumhead made by the Remo company that features two seven-millimeter-thick layers of mylar, an additional seven-millimeter-thick inlay ring, and a five-millimeter-thick circle in the playing area of the drumhead.2 This drumhead can be found in various drumlines such as Tennessee State University’s The Authority and the Southern University’s Funk Factory shown below.

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Another drumhead favored by SWAC style drumlines such as Lane College’s Bloody Rain and Alcorn State University’s Tower of Power is the Remo Emperor X which is a black ten-milliliter two-ply construction with an added five-millimeter dot on the underside of the drumhead.³

Outliers to this stylistic choice of drumhead is that of Texas Southern University’s “Funk Train” who, use both Powerstroke 77s (shown below) and Evans Hybrid

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drumheads which, according to D’Addario is a drumhead comprised of two different fibers with a transparent coating on top of the weave.45

Figure 2.3 showing the drumheads used by Texas Southern University’s “Funk Train.”

Other outliers include Alabama State University’s T.T.B., Grambling State University’s Chocolate Thunder, Prairie View A&M University’s M.S.D. and the University of Arkansas at Pine Bluff’s II Kold Krank who use Kevlar heads although the latter two drumlines tune their snares lower possibly to emulate the sound of a drum set snare drum.

Other drumheads that are popular with traditional style drumlines include the Remo Whitemax, Remo Blackmax used by Florida A&M University’s Z-28 and the Evans System Blue shown below used by Bethune Cookman’s Sudden Impact.

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4 Darryl Singleton, Kelton Penson, and Jeffery Yon, interviewed by Ricardo Reese and Elisha Powell, HBCU Drumline Talk, March 17th, 2021, on YouTube, video, 1:01:44, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_n5hJ9EXa6Q.
These Kevlar heads are used by all of the HBCU drumlines that play in the MEAC style. When asked, Lamon Lawhorn, stated that the choice of the Kevlar head is for the sake of clarity. He went further to state that while you can, and should, play cleanly on a mylar head such as a Remo Powerstroke 77, the natural resonance of the drumhead can overpower the sometimes-small nuances within the literature. After further listening to differences between Mylar and Kevlar heads, it can be concluded that Kevlar heads do not have resonance or overtones present in the mylar heads thus giving the Kevlar heads a touch more clarity depending on the environment. It should however be noted that what the Kevlar head gives in clarity, it lacks in volume.

**Single and Multi-Tenor Drumheads**

Moving on to the drumheads used for the single and multi-tenor drums. These drumheads influence the sound of the drumline just as much as the snare and bass drumheads. Dealing first with single tenor drums, drumheads used from ensembles from various parts of the country fall into three categories. The first being the Remo Emperor Clear drumhead which is a clear mylar drumhead with two plys of seven-millemeter-

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6 Lamon Lawhorn, interviewed by author, via zoom, November 22, 2021.
thick material much like the Powerstoke 77\textsuperscript{7} used by The Authority, or the Evans EC2 which is made of the same material as the clear Emperor drumhead.\textsuperscript{8} The EC2 is used by Sudden Impact.\textsuperscript{9} The second category is a multi-ply black drumhead, such as the Remo Ebony Pinstripe or Ebony Suede which are two-ply drumheads much like the EC2 or the Emperor Clear however, both plies are black with an additional seven-milliliter-thick-clear film on top giving this drumhead durability and articulation.\textsuperscript{10} can been seen in use by Cold Steel in figure 2.4. The last category consists of Remo’s Controlled Sound drumheads used by Funk Factory and Funk Train. These drumheads are constructed with of a single ten-millimeter-thick mylar layer with an additional five-milliliter-thick black dot on the in the center of the head that acts as an overtone dampener while giving the head extra durability.\textsuperscript{11}

\textsuperscript{9} Pedro Orey, interviewed by author, via zoom December 8, 2021
Figure 2.5 showing the drumheads used by “Cold Steel” of North Carolina A&T State University (top left), “The Authority” of Tennessee State University (top right) and “Funk Train” of Texas Southern University.

Multi-tenor heads do not fall into the same three categories as single tenors, but they are mostly if not all two-ply heads that are usually clear. Example of these clear heads include the Remo Emperor Clear drumhead and the Evans EC2 used by lines such as Sudden Impact.¹²

**Bass Drumheads**

Unlike snare heads that vary according to style of playing, bass drumhead choice is subject to the individual drumline’s historical sound profile as well as the type of material that they play and what sound that instructor would like.

One of the most resonant bass drumheads is the Remo Fiberskyn which is only found in the bass drum sections that play in the SWAC style such as Talladega College’s “Renegade Rebels” and Jackson State University’s War and Thunder shown below.

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¹² Pedro Orey, interviewed by author, via zoom December 8, 2021.
These drumheads combine a warm timbre with an “enhanced low frequency” that give optimal projection.\textsuperscript{13}

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{talladega_jackson_state.png}
\caption{Figure 2.6 Showing Talladega College’s “Renegade Rebels” (Top) and Jackson State University’s “War and Thunder” (Bottom) both using Remo Fiberskyn bass drumheads.}
\end{figure}

Another drumhead used by bass drummers in the SWAC style drumline community is the Remo Clear Black Dot drumhead. This head is renowned for its sharp attack which gives added projection to the entire bass drum section while the center dot provides added durability reducing the number of drumheads needed to keep the drums in working condition.\textsuperscript{14} These drumheads have become engrained in the sounds of bands such as that of Southern University, Texas Southern University and Alabama State University shown here.

A favorite of tonal bass drum lines are the Evans MX series, and the Remo Powermax which are a bass drum head made with one ply of 10-millemeter-thick material with an added dot on the inside of the head which provides durability, and a foam muffling ring to add durability.\textsuperscript{15,16} both the bass drumheads as seen used with drumlines such as Virginia State University’s Drum-Phi and South Carolina State University’s Bongo Brothers Inc.

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=0.8\textwidth]{figure2_7}
\caption{Figure 2.7 Showing Alabama State University’s “TTB” using Remo Controlled Sound bass drumheads.}
\end{figure}

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=0.8\textwidth]{figure2_8}
\caption{Figure 2.8 Showing the Evans MS2 drumheads used by both “Bongo Brothers” of South Carolina State University (top) and “Drum Phi” of Virginia State University(bottom).}
\end{figure}


As it can be seen, certain drumlines take pride in customizing their bass drum heads to display their school’s name and sometimes their school’s crest. One benefit of using the smooth white bass drumheads such as the Powermax is that they can be printed on by the manufacturer thus allowing the bass drum to have a cleaner look than one that was painted using spray paint and stencil.

Figure 2.9 Showing customized drumheads being used by Bethune Cookman University’s “Sudden Impact” and Florida Agricultural and Mechanical University’s “Z-28”

Tuning

When considering the concept of tuning, one of the most important aspects to consider is the size of the band as Ralph Hardimon, retired battery arranger for Santa Clara Vanguard pointed out on the HBCU Drumline talk podcast. However, the concept of tuning can be subjective from ensemble to ensemble. Tuning depends on the function of the ensemble, the sound profile that they would like to have, and the type of drumhead that the drumline is using. For example, the Remo Fiberskyn bass drumhead can be placed under high tension and used for tonal bass drum playing, but it is typically undesirable due to its resonance that would hinder the articulation needed for tonal

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17 Ralph Hardimon, interviewed by Ricardo Reese and Elisha Powell, HBCU Drumline Talk, July 11th, 2021, on Youtube, video, 33:58, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1t_0e0ngjIw&t=3929s
Therefore, when FiberSkyn heads are used with certain HBCU ensembles such as The Authority of Tennessee State University or the Renegade Rebels of Talladega College, the drumhead is tuned to optimize its resonance. This is not to say that the drums should be tuned loosely as this could lead to wrinkles in the drumhead which is a direct sign of the lack of tension. In fact, this lack of tension will hinder the drumhead from resonating properly. When interviewing Johnny Lane, traditional product manager for Dynasty USA, and former director of percussion at Tennessee State University, the FiberSkyn heads should be tuned to F2 to produce the best tone.  

On the other hand, the Remo Powermax or Evans MX series bass drumheads can be tuned higher because they were developed to have a short, muffled sound that will provide the maximum amount of articulation for the material played by the tonal bass drums. In fact, both aforementioned drumheads are sold “pre-muffled” with a thin, felt muffling ring on the inside of the drumhead. The tuning of traditional-style tonal basses is, much like the tuning of unison basses, proprietary to each school but according to Lamon Lawhorn and Pedro Orey, the tonal bases are tuned in intervals of major or minor thirds or perfect fourths.

According to Lawhorn, multi-toms are tuned in major or minor intervals much like tonal bass drums. The main difference is in the tension of the heads. SWAC style

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19 Johnny Lee Lane, interviewed by author, via zoom, October 21, 2021.  
22 Pedro Orey, interviewed by author, via zoom December 8, 2021.  
23 Lamon Lawhorn, interviewed by author, via zoom, November 22, 2021.  
24 Lamon Lawhorn, interviewed by author, via zoom, November 22, 2021.
drumlines typically have lower tuned multi-tom lines to blend with the dark timbre of the rest of the section while MEAC style drumlines as well as those SWAC style drumlines in Texas have higher tuned multi-tom lines to blend with their brighter sound profile. Another reason that their multi-toms could be tuned so high would be to emulate the sounds of bongos and timbales.25

According to my research, schools that have single tenors, whether chest-mounted or leg mounted tune their drums within the same range which is from C4 to G#4 with drum sizes ranging from fourteen to sixteen inches in diameter. According to Professor Lane the optimal tuning for a single tenor drum is C4, however each drumline has a different tuning concept.26 Determining the definite pitch on these drums can be difficult due to the head being unmuffled thus allowing for a wide spectrum of overtones. The type of drumhead used also plays a part in the fundamental and overtones produced by the single tenor drums. For this reason, most single tenor lines will have a tuning range such as E4 to F#4 as heard by Alabama State University’s drumline.27 Appendix A is a complete table of all HBCU drumlines that have single tenor drums and their tuning ranges. To determine the ranges, a tuner with adjustable frequency was used to correctly identify the fundamental of each section’s single tenor drum pitch. It should be noted that certain smaller and often younger drumlines like that of Philander Smith College did not have any available recordings of their marching band or drumline. Furthermore, tuning largely depends on the size of the drums being used with larger drums often having a higher tuning. Another factor that impacts tuning, at least in the case of FAMU’s Z-28 is

25 Lamon Lawhorn, interviewed by author, via zoom, November 22, 2021.
26 Johnny Lee Lane, interviewed by author, via zoom, October 21, 2021.
27 Appendix A.
the use of two different single tenor drum sizes which they refer to as tenors and toms.\textsuperscript{28} These drums are different sizes and are added to create the feel of a large drum set resulting in them being tuned differently and playing different parts.\textsuperscript{29}

Moving on to snare drums, tuning once again depends on the type of head used. Heads that are the most frequented are the Remo Blackmax or Whitemax, the Remo Powerstroke 77, the Remo Black X, and the Evans System Blue. Dealing first with the Mylar heads which are the Powerstroke 77 and the Emperor X, my research has shown that their tuning generally lies around C5. Furthermore, I have found that the Emperor X sounds darker no matter the tension due to its thick construction.

Kevlar heads are a different in both sound and tension. These drumheads are tuned higher than mylar heads and feature a short attack with minimal resonance. In my interview with Dr. Lawhorn, he notes that the tuning of these Kevlar heads may change according to their environment to aid with dynamics.\textsuperscript{30} Lawhorn points out that higher tuning is employed when indoors to give more clarity amid the live acoustics of what would possibly be a gymnasium while lower tuning is employed while outside so that the sound of the drums will be heard when playing with the band. Lawhorn further points out that although instrumentation, drumheads, and sticks may be the same, tuning is the largest differentiator between any section, no matter the style in which they play.\textsuperscript{31}

\textbf{Chapter 3}

\textbf{Sticks and Mallets}

\textsuperscript{28} Taurus Lovely and Tovah Lovely, interview by Ricardo Reese and Elisha Powell, \textit{HBCU Drumline Talk}, March 10th, 2021, on YouTube, video, 50:38, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yu7ncNABNqk&t=2226s
\textsuperscript{29} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{30} Lamon Lawhorn, interviewed by author, via zoom, November 22, 2021.
\textsuperscript{31} Ibid.
The sticks and mallets chosen by traditional-style drumlines can vary per group. It should be noted that some lines use one stick exclusively while other drumlines may switch to a different model or brand of sticks and mallets altogether depending on what the student leaders would like to play with that year. Until the year 2020, there was an entire series of drumsticks, single tenor drum, and bass drum mallets dedicated to traditional-style marching band: the Vic Firth company’s Johnny Lee Lane “Groove Series” (shown below) that featured a snare drumstick, a single tenor mallet, and two bass drum mallets: the Scotch Groove, made for thinner scotch bass drums, and the Thunder, Groove made for the typical fourteen-inch wide bass drum shown below.

![Groove Series](image)

Figure 3.1 Showing the sticks within the former Groove Series designed by Johnny Lee Lane in conjunction with the Vic Firth company.

This line of sticks did not feature a multi-tenor stick or mallet because as Professor Lane simply states, he did not think about multi-tenors when developing his stick line.
Before this line of sticks and mallets was developed, brands such as Silver Fox manufactured the snare drum sticks and bass drum mallets that were sought after by programs.¹ A popular tenor drum mallet was the Ludwig 2333, which features a medium mallet head on an aluminum shaft with a rubber grip at the other end along with a leather thong for stability. The addition of a thong or rope on the end of the mallet dates back at least to the 1950s; Jack Lee stated in his book that “leather hand straps should be fastened to the bottom of the sticks in order for twirling to be done without losing the sticks.”²

Besides this line of sticks and mallets, various sticks have been popularized by the traditional-style marching community, such as the American Drum Company’s Blackjack series as seen used by SWAC drumlines like War and Thunder of Jackson State University.

Figure 3.2 Showing the various mallets used for both single tenor and bass drums made by the American Drum company.

¹ Pedro Orey, interviewed by author, via zoom December 8, 2021.
There is another series of sticks that are popular among HBCU drumlines named BYOS which stands for Bring Your Own Style designed by Harvey Thompson and Ralph Nader in conjunction with the ProMark by D’Addario Company as shown below.  

![Figure 3.3 showing the signature BYOS sticks designed by Ralph Nader and Harvey Thompson in conjunction with the ProMark company.](image)

These sticks are series snare and multi-tenor sticks designed for “show-style” drum lines as they feature rubber rings on the back of the sticks to help the player grip the stick while executing stick tricks.  

Both MEAC and corps-style multi-tenor players can be found using wooden sticks that resemble marching snare drumsticks or sticks with a wooden or metal shaft with a plastic or acrylic head. Corps-style tenor players go a bit further to use a variety of specialty sticks and mallets that change based on the demands of the music that they are playing such as soft felt mallets or brushes. Conversely, SWAC style HBCU drumlines such as Alcorn State University, Tennessee State University, and Jackson State University use mallets with a metal shaft and an acrylic head for projection and durability.

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The decision of which stick these lines use is at the discretion of the band director or percussion instructor. While the MEAC style drumlines that I have observed, such as the multi-tenor line at Florida Agricultural and Mechanical University who are shown below using acrylic-headed mallet. Another exception to the SWAC style is “M.S.D.” of Prairie View Agricultural and Mechanical University who are also shown below using plastic headed sticks with wooden shafts.
**Stick Tape**

A major difference between the sticks used by corps-style programs and those used by traditional-style programs is the use of stick tape. SWAC style drumlines take great pride in wrapping their sticks in a variety of different color electrical tape. These colors are usually that of the institution. In addition to the school colors, traditional-style drumlines also include various types of chrome auto detailing tape, usually acquired from an auto parts store. Traditional-style drumlines combine both the detailing tape and different color electrical tape to make what I classify as works of performance art only to be recreated differently for the next game. Some examples of this stick art can be seen below with a set of bass drum mallets.

![Fig. 3.6](image.png) Showing the stick art on a set of bass drum mallets.

This style of stick taping is one of the traditional elements that have been in place in many traditional-style drumlines since at least the early 2000s. Different ensembles have different taping methods, which be either simpler than the design shown above, or more complex and intricate. Taping in this manner is solely based on preference, but ensembles would do well to have one or two people per sub-section to tape everyone’s sticks for the sake of uniformity. In the case of Tennessee State’s drumline, each subsection has a
designated person in charge of taping sticks for each performance and the other sub-
section members are responsible for supplying the tape.

Not all traditional-style drumlines use this multi-colored approach, however. I
have observed that some traditional-style drumlines, mainly those who play in the MEAC
style, such as Hampton University and Bethune Cookman University, have adopted the
white-only stick tape approach found in corps-style drumlines. According to Prof. Orey,
the white stick tape is used because it provides a “cleaner/clearer look” for the snares as
they are doing various stick tricks and moves.\footnote{Pedro Orey, interviewed by author, via zoom December 8, 2021.} One important thing Prof. Orey stated
when being asked about this preference was “for how we play.”\footnote{Ibid.} This statement sums up
the individual nuances specific to each school’s drumline because each line has
developed a performance practice specific to the way that they have historically done
things. This, much like uniforms, drumheads, and certain “spirit” songs has become a
part of the school’s tradition.

**Playing Technique**

Playing technique is one of the few elements that tend to divide the traditional-
style marching community. There are two different schools of thought about playing: the
Moeller method, named after Sanford Moeller, and the Stone method, named after
(October 1993), http://publications.pas.org/Archive/pnv31n7/articles/pnv31n7.86-92.pdf.} George Stone based his stroke off of the premise that each joint in the
arm should be free to move about as needed for dynamic purposes.\footnote{Ibid.} He separated his
playing system into three distinct movements, the finger stroke, in which the stroke is
executed by pushing the fingers into the palm with slight movement from the wrist; the wrist stroke, executed by pushing the stick into the drum head while bending at the wrist only, and the arm or full stroke, which is executed by bending at the elbow.\textsuperscript{10} There seems to be a trend that HBCU drumlines that play in the MEAC style such as Bethune Cookman University’s “Sudden Impact”, and South Carolina State University’s “Bongo Brothers” use the Stone method.

Sanford Moeller’s technique can best be depicted as cracking a whip. Jim Chapin describes this stroke approach as trying to get heavy grease from one’s hands when playing. Much like Stone, Moeller breaks his stroke down into three movements: the full stroke, the upstroke, and the single tap.\textsuperscript{11} I have found this playing style to be common with drumlines that play in the SWAC style, with the exception being Alabama State University’s T.T.B., the two larger HBCU drumlines from Prairie View Agricultural and Mechanical University’s M.S.D., and Funk Train, who play in the SWAC style but use the Stone technique. Much like those programs on the east coast, the styles of this region’s HBCU drumlines influence the playing styles of the surrounding middle and high school programs just as DCI groups heavily influence corps-style programs.

When current drumline instructors such as Lamon Lawhorn, Pedro Orey, and former drumline instructor Johnny Lee Lane, were asked why they chose to use one technique over the other, they all responded that their choice of technique is a product of their experiences in high school, undergraduate school, and in some cases, graduate school. Afterward, they took those experiences with them to the school(s) where they taught or still teach as in the case of Prof. Orey, who, in our interview, recalled his

undergraduate study with Ricky Burkhead at Mississippi Valley State University. Orey stated that he has adapted Prof. Burkhead’s method of melodic percussion writing when writing for his current section at BCU.\(^{12}\) Prof. Orey further states that the playing technique used at BCU is a mix of both Stone and Moeller playing techniques.\(^{13}\)

Synthesizing this information allowed me to conclude that all drumlines that utilize the Stone technique can be found with their drums at an ideal height and at an angle parallel to the ground and feature an instrumentation that almost mimics that of a corps-style program that use the Moeller technique usually have sagging drums and instrumentation that is reminiscent of the marching percussion described by Jack Lee. One outlier to this conclusion is Florida A&M University’s “Z-28” which traditionally uses the Moeller technique but has integrated the Stone method into their newer material.\(^{14}\) This variance can be seen especially in videos “FAMU Drumline 2018 vs BCU” and “FAMU Drumline - 2018 Florida Classic BOTB” found on YouTube.\(^{15}\)

**Chapter 4**

**Equipment**

Traditional-style drumlines use the same equipment as any other contemporary drum line, with instruments coming from many major instrument manufactures, such as Yamaha, Dynasty, and Pearl. The main difference between HBCU drumlines and most PWI drumlines is how the drums are carried. Most traditional-style drumlines still utilize

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\(^{12}\) Pedro Orey, interviewed by author, via zoom December 8, 2021.
\(^{13}\) Ibid.
\(^{14}\) Florida Agricultural and Mechanical University. “FAMU NAACP Percussion Performance”. October 25, 2020, video, 3:54, [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xzALYShEVmU](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xzALYShEVmU).
the drum sling which is a strap that is either worn across the players body much like a satchel, or on the player’s back in a backpack-style fashion. These slings have hooks with spring locking latches that attach to either eye bolts on the bass drums or chest mounted single tenor drums, and angle reduction bars on the snare drums and leg mounted single tenor drums.

![Image of drum slings](image1.png)

Fig. 4.1 showing both a snare drum/ leg-mounted single tenor drum sling(black) and a bass drum/chest-mounted single tenor drum (white) as well as how the bass drum slings are worn and attached to the drum.

![Image of drum slings](image2.png)

Fig. 4.2 showing a comparison between the snare/single tenor slings worn during the Revolutionary War era (Left) in comparison to the snare/single tenor slings worn by traditional-style percussionists of the twenty-first century(right).

As can be seen in figure 3.2, the method of carry a marching drum with a sling has not changed very much since Revolutionary War era with the weight of the drum being supported by the right shoulder. The sling, or “strap” as it is commonly called, is connected to the drum via an angle reduction bar assembly shown below.
These angle reduction bars may be aftermarket purchases that can be affixed to the drum using the tension rod to hold them in place, or they may come permanently bolted to the drum as shown on the Dynasty drum above. The angle reduction bars made by Pearl are installed using channels found under the hoop of the pearl drums. These angle reduction bars are meant to reduce the rightward tilt that was common in drums in the eighteenth century as shown in figure 4.3.

The second stabilization piece is the leg rest. Modern leg rests have been vast improvements from the “leg clamps” that Jack Lee describes,16 with some of the most common being the Pearl LR-40 or LR-60 or the Ludwig LF-479 as shown below. This component not only keeps the drum in place while marching but works with the angle reduction system to maintain a level playing surface by pushing the drum away from the player’s body to keep the drum from leaning forward.

Problems that I have observed when using slings occur are usually the result of poor sling height, the lack of an angle reduction bar or the lack of adequate padding on the leg rest. When a sling is not adjusted to the proper length, it typically leads to players with either sagging drums or drums that may be too high and will not allow the player to play with proper technique. When the drum sags, it causes the drum to rest below the optimal playing position as shown in figure 4.5. This low height of the drum causes poor playing technique due to the over-extension of the player’s arm. According to Gary Cook, the ideal playing instrument height is one that allows the player’s arms to be parallel to the floor.17 From my own informal study of various drumlines both in person and on YouTube, many lines who allow their drums to sag which result in their arms falling below the optimal playing position and in some cases their forearms are at angles upwards of 130 degrees.18

Figure 4.5 Showing the difference in drum angles with “Sudden Impact” on the left representing MEAC style drumlines and Grambling State University’s “Chocolate Thunder” on the right representing SWAC style drumlines.

Further problems arise when players use bolt snaps (shown below) to connect the sling directly to the tension rods.

![Bolt Snap Hook](image)

Figure. 4.6 Showing the bolt snap hooks used by some drumlines to connect their sling to their drums.

This method exerts extra force on the tension rods that could cause the tension rods to bend or even break due to them supporting the weight of the drum during play combined with the outward force that is placed upon them due to the often-swift motions of picking up the drum.

Figure 4.7 showing how some drumlines hook their drum straps directly around the tension rods.

Going further, leg rests can also cause problems with the way a drum is carried. The leg rest must be constantly maintained by ensuring that each fastening nut is
tightened or else a nut could fall off causing the drum to be destabilized or worse, rendering the entire leg rest completely useless. A more common issue that can be seen in figures 4.5 and 4.7 is the leg rest not pushing the drum away from the leg far enough, resulting in a forward slant in the marching drum. In my years of experience as a drumline instructor, I have found that this can be fixed by adding extra padding to the inside of the leg rest that actually comes in contact with the leg in order to push the drum outward.

Another problem with the sling methodology is when it comes to bass drums. Most bass drums, whether corps-style or traditional-style, range between twenty and thirty inches in diameter. These can weigh upwards of thirty pounds and can put a tremendous strain on the back of the player. There are pedagogues such as Gary Cook, author of the percussion pedagogy book *Teaching Percussion*, who strongly advise against the use of slings for bass drum,¹⁹ but I have yet to see research that bass drum carriers do more than straps to better distribute the weight of the bass drum and the effects that long periods of playing have on the players. I do, however, agree with Cook’s assertion that frequent break should be given to bass drummers to give their back muscles time to rest.²⁰

With so many problems with slings, one may ask, “why haven’t they been eliminated?” and the answer is multi-faceted. Carriers, although they are marketed as being comfortable,²¹ are also rigid and inhibit HBCU percussionists from executing basic movements such as the ninety-degree leg lift that is common with HBCU bands. These

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¹⁹Gary D. Cook, *Teaching Percussion*, 335.
²⁰Ibid 335.
carriers also do not allow for the dancing and drum movements often found within HBCU drumlines. There are drumlines, such as Norfolk State and Elizabeth City State University who use carriers for their bass drums while using slings for their snare drums. Further, Vincent Smith states that continued use of slings on both the high school and collegiate levels is an element of tradition. The collegiate drum lines use them, and high schools see this and emulate it. When their students come of age and attended the colleges that they were watching, they keep these same traditions. Smith goes on to state that for change to happen with the way traditional-style drum lines carry their drums, it would need to be seen from a “program of influence.”

**Auxiliary Instruments**

Other instruments that can be found in certain traditional-style drumlines are auxiliary instruments such as tambourines and cowbells and plastic wood blocks or jam blocks. One section that has been using these instruments constantly is Bethune Cookman University’s (BCU) Sudden Impact. When asked during our interview on why Sudden Impact uses these auxiliary instruments, Pedro Orey stated that he wanted to have more sounds available for the drumline and added both cowbells and tambourines to their snare drums despite the weight they add to the drums. Another drumline that has recently added auxiliary instruments is Norfolk State University’s Million Dollar Funk Squad (MDFS) shown below.

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22 Vince Smith, interviewed by author, via zoom, September 8, 2021.
23 Pedro Orey, interviewed by author, via zoom December 8, 2021
Unlike Sudden Impact, MDFS uses only cowbells attached to their snare drums. Schools in the past that have used cowbells differently include Morris Brown College, which attached cowbells to their multi-toms as shown below.

![Figure 4.8 Showing members of Norfolk State University’s “Million Dollar Funk Squad” snare line with cowbells mounted on their drums.](image)

![Figure 4.9 Showing Morris Brown College’s “Stickin Sensation” multi-tenor line with cowbells mounted on them.](image)

**Cymbals**

Moving on to the instruments that do not require slings, cymbals and multi-tenors are also instruments that can be found in many corps-style sections. There is little to no difference between the multi-toms used in corps-style playing and those of traditional-style playing. Cymbals in any setting add flair and emphasis to any drumline cadence or musical arrangement. Both traditional and corps-style cymbal lines have incorporated
flashes and other types of pageantry in their playing. The Santa Clara Vanguard is known for its innovative cymbal line moves such as the viper, seen below.

![Cymbal Line Performing Viper](image)

Figure 4.10 Showing Santa Clara Vanguard’s cymbal line performing the “Viper.”

Traditional-style cymbal playing goes a bit further by mixing flashy visuals with dance moves to form what are known as “cymbal flashes.” According to DeRon “Hollywood” Sheapard, an HBCU cymbal expert and what some would call the face of the Zildjian Phi Zildjian organization, cymbal twirling started in New Orleans with just a few “basic twirls”. In Sheapard’s documentary about the organization entitled “Zildjian GoeZ Hollywood” the organization’s founder Artside C. Williams Sr. discusses the beginnings of the organization during his time at Southern University. During this marching tenure, Artside taught his other section mates various twirls and techniques to push their pageantry to another level. Eventually, students from the high schools surrounding Southern University, whose band program emulated Southern University’s

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marching band, went off to college and spread the culture of cymbal twirling.\textsuperscript{26} Since their spread to the various parts of the country, flashes have been showcased almost every time a traditional-style drumline is playing. They consist of various techniques that have been standardized by the Zildjian Phi Zildjian organization or (Z phi Z), a fraternity exclusively comprised of HBCU cymbal players. These techniques include: the illusion which, according to Shepard, is done by cupping your hand over the pad of the cymbal to guide it in different directions. According to Sheapard, the goal is to be able to twirl the cymbals without making a sound\textsuperscript{27}. In their clinic at PASIC 2021, Dr. Virgil Goodwine and DeRon Shepard discussed, the differences in cymbal playing technique between corps-style and traditional-style drumlines aside from pageantry. One of the differences discussed was that unlike corps-style programs, traditional-style cymbal lines do not use leather straps and pads for marching. Instead, these lines utilize bandanas possible because they are more comfortable than the leather straps on the player’s fingers as they use either their middle and index fingers, or their middle and ring fingers to hold the cymbals as seen in figure 4.11. These players also use cloth pads which can also be car buffing pads and tie them in a square knot on the underside of the cymbal.\textsuperscript{28}

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{figure4.11.png}
\caption{Figure 4.11 Showing the differences in grip between traditional style and corps style drumlines.}
\end{figure}

\textsuperscript{26} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{27} Virgil Goodwine and DeRon Shepard, “Flash and Flare: Fundamentals of Cymbal Twirling”(lecture, Percussive Arts Society International Convention, Indianapolis, IN November 12\textsuperscript{th}, 2021).
\textsuperscript{28} Ibid.
While these cloth pads can have a dampening effect on the cymbal,\textsuperscript{29} that dampening effect is not as noticeable as one would think especially since these cloth pads are close in diameter to the typical leather cymbal pads. One could argue that moving from a Mylar to a Kevlar drumhead has a dampening effect on a snare line by minimizing the resonance of the drumhead but just as this has become a preference for programs for the sake of cleanliness, it is my opinion that these cloth pads are an acceptable preference for the comfort of the player and should not be discouraged unless the cymbal pads are obnoxiously large. As a further difference, traditional-style cymbal lines hold and control their cymbals with their fingers instead of their entire hand so that the handle that they create with the bandana is much smaller than that of the typical cymbal strap.\textsuperscript{30}

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=0.5\textwidth]{cloth_cymbal_straps.png}
\caption{Showing the cloth cymbal straps used by traditional style drumlines.}
\end{figure}

As one can imagine, this small handle leaves a lot of excess material on the underside of the cymbal. Because of this, some cymbal lines wrap the excess material around the already existing knot and secure it with an additional knot thus creating a cleaner look, which is important because the underside of the cymbal is the most exposed part for both playing and completing cymbal flashes shown below.

\textsuperscript{29} Gary D. Cook, \textit{Teaching Percussion} 3\textsuperscript{rd} ed. (California: Schirmer Cengage Learning 2006) 342.
\textsuperscript{30} Virgil Goodwine and DeRon Sheapard, “Flash and Flare: Fundamentals of Cymbal Twirling” (lecture, Percussive Arts Society International Convention, Indianapolis, IN November 12\textsuperscript{th}, 2021)
Chapter 5

Types of Music that HBCU Bands Play

The goal of the traditional-style percussion arranger is to create interesting parts for each song that are complex enough to challenge the group and recruit new students but not so complex as to distort the groove of a in the song unless asked for by the wind arranger. Furthermore, parts need to be concise enough to be memorized by the drumline because of the vast amount of music that they are required to have at their disposal. As an illustration of the amount of music that traditional-style percussionists are required to know, we can break each element of performance into three main sections which are: songs played during field shows at halftime, songs played in the stands and songs played during parades.

Music Played During Field Shows

The first category, music played during field shows, can contain anywhere from four to ten different songs depending on the number of segments that show has. A typical field show contains an opener, a drill, a song to showcase the auxiliary element(s) of the band, a ballad, and a dance segment that can feature as many small portions as possible of
music that the band director would like to see in the dance portion.\textsuperscript{1} All of these show segments are set to music. Some shows also include a drum major feature which may add another song, and/or a feature moment/formation in the show which can highlight an important event on the school’s campus, an important event in the band’s history, or a moment dedicated to the city in which the band is performing.

**Music Played in the Stands**

The second category, music played in the stands, can further be broken down into two smaller categories: traditional music and seasonal selections. Traditional music is songs that have become synonymous with the school's band such as “Get Ready” as played by Jackson State University’s marching band, or “Let’s Go Wildcats” as played by Bethune Cookman University’s Marching Wildcats. Seasonal selections are songs that the band may be playing to fit the current time period of musical selections. These are mostly popular top 100 hits that are known to please the crowd. These songs can also be selections that will be used to battle other bands, which is a common practice in the HBCU band community. In fact, most HBCU games will feature a fifth quarter after the football game has concluded in which both marching bands will take turns playing songs in efforts to outdo each other. According to Teddy Hall, “comparison” has always been prevalent in the black community at large and the competitiveness in the HBCU band culture is mostly social media driven.\textsuperscript{2} One other contributor to this comparison culture is the rise of YouTube and the development of smartphones integrating high-quality cameras. Before YouTube, bands could not be seen at the click of a mouse; instead, fans and rivals would have to attend either the game or band event to see their band of choice.

\textsuperscript{1} Reginald McDonald, interviewed by author, in person, October 24\textsuperscript{th}, 2021
\textsuperscript{2} Teddy Hall, interviewed by author, via zoom, September 28, 2021.
As YouTube and smartphones developed, it allowed anyone with a smartphone to record a band and post it to YouTube or another social media platform. Furthermore, media personnel solely dedicated to capturing marching bands, such as Killa Kev Productions and Smash Time Media, have made marching bands readily available. While this is a great tool for the recruitment of potential students to each band programs that they would otherwise not see, it also allows current band students to see what their “rivals” are doing and how the fans responded to them. This, in turn, could lead to sections forsaking their historical identities to appease the comment section.

**Music Played in Parades**

Moving on, the last category, parade music, are just that. Songs played either in a formal parade or any time the band is marching from destination to destination. These songs can be adapted from either of the former two categories or can be songs strictly designated for this use. From my observation, songs that are adapted to this category have a faster tempo. This is possibly to keep the band moving quickly throughout the parade.

**Competition Between Band Programs**

Corps-style bands, mainly those belonging to Drum Corps International, also have a competitive component, but the difference is in the way that these ensembles are judged. While corps-style bands are judged by a panel of judges, most HBCU band competitions are subjective, and if there is an actual winner, it is determined by means of audience appreciation in the form of applause rather than expert opinion. Traditional style drumlines have different approaches to music, cadence and song writing, and sonic concepts, with certain lines using certain drumheads as discussed earlier. This makes adjudication a bit more difficult, as sometimes the adjudicator is essentially judging
between apples and oranges. Most traditional-style band or drumline competitions are merely subjective with the most popular of these competitions being the Honda Battle of the Bands that is normally held in January at the Mercedes-Benz dome in Atlanta, and the National Battle of the Bands held in Houston in August at the Astrodome. These “battles” are merely showcases in which eight invited bands are allowed to perform field shows for an audience solely in exhibition and, in the case of the National Battle of the Bands, a few song selections. Part of the reason for lack of adjudication may be due to the various styles of HBCU drumline performance leading to a lack of standardization across the board. This is not to say that there is no set standard of musicianship and playing ability between schools, but instead that certain traditional aspects are factored to govern a section’s playing style.

HBCU drumline battles are just as subjective, but many regions treat the drumline battle differently. For example, drumlines who play in the MEAC style usually treat a gym battle as a showcase, or drum feature that is usually one continuous piece consisting of different cadences that have been arranged together or even a cadence that has be written specifically for that battle. Lawhorn actually speaks about how this caught him by surprise in the beginning of his tenure at NCAT because, as we will discuss momentarily, drumline battles are treated differently in other regions of the country.3

SWAC style drumline battles are usually orchestrated the same: instructors usually agree to a set number of cadences and the drumlines take turns playing a cadence back and forth. According to Lawhorn, this shows the true versatility of a drumline

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3 Lamon Lawhorn, interview by Ricardo Reese and Elisha Powell, HBCU Drumline Talk, May 25th, 2021, on YouTube, video, 52:28, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yIaF3NrUcLw&t=1448s
because it allows them to show the flexibility of their material and writing style. There are cases where MEAC style drumlines will use this format but usually it is because they are competing against a drumline from a different region such as in the case of Virginia State University’s Drum Phi battling Lane College’s Bloody Rain.

Song Part Construction

With the provided context above, it is now possible to discuss part construction as it pertains to settings in which the drumline is serving in an accompaniment role. SWAC style drumlines such as The Authority seem to construct their song parts in a manner that is identical to the pattern played in the song. These parts with a main groove, a “kick” or drum fill(s) that function as transitions to a new section or as a moment to end the phrase. There are also occasions where the kick is used to begin or end a song.

Both SWAC and MEAC style drumlines construct their parts in the same way, but MEAC drumlines, according to Dr. Lawhorn, maximize their drum-breaks by writing material to showcase their students’ talents, whereas most SWAC style marching bands will not feature a stand-alone drum break in songs. Tim Greene, drumline instructor at South Carolina State University, points out is that HBCU drumline arrangers often have to take a groove played on drum set and make it interesting for each member of the drumline because each of them is only playing a piece of the drum set.

Chapter 6

4 ibid
5 Killa Kev Productions, “Virginia State’s ”Drum-Phi” Vs Lane College’s ”Bloody Rain” - Percussion Battle - 2018 [4K,” October 6th, 2018 YouTube video, 0:00-21:23, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ot0C0qsppWns&t=973s
6 “More Than A Back Beak” 19:37
7 Lamon Lawhorn, interviewed by author, via zoom, November 22, 2021
Warm-Ups

Cadences can be split into four different groups: warm-ups, battle cadences, marching cadences, and traditional cadences. Certain drumlines such as “Million Dollar Funk Squad” do not divide their cadences into type. In fact, director Shawn Hall states that there have been times where they have played the same cadence to move the band and in the stand during the game.¹

Warm-ups used by traditional-style drumlines are much like that of a corps-style section in that they employ variations of “eight on a hand” exercises as well as different diddle exercises. Below I have included a sample drumline warm-up from The Complete Marching Band Resource Manual showing a standard eight, or in this case, sixteen-on-a-hand warm-up written for a percussion section of a corps-style program that has a percussion pit.²

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¹ Shawn Hall, interviewed by author, via Facebook, January 28th, 2022
Figure 6.1 showing a warmup for marching percussion from Bailey, Cannon and Payne’s *The Complete Marching Band Resource Manual*.

This warmup is used to engage the muscles performers use while playing activated and loose, as well as to develop technique and ensemble timing. The warmup period can also serve as a tool to channel the focus of the drumline for the rehearsal objectives of the day. Dynamics and accents are sometimes incorporated as well to work on control at different volumes, and to develop uniformity of dynamic changes across the ensemble. This is a crucial skill so that the ensemble is able to flawlessly change dynamics at the same time. Other warm-ups may be employed to work on other concepts such as diddle uniformity.

If a traditional-style percussion section does not incorporate the warm-up style as mentioned above, they may instead incorporate a type of groove in their warm-ups that can develop the heavy call and response nature between the bass drum and single tenor

\[\text{Ibid.}\]
drums, This groove may be based on one of the section’s other cadences as is the warm-up shown in figure 6.2.

Figure 6.2. Showing a warmup used by “The Authority” of Tennessee State University.
Figure 6.2 features a warm-up based on the Authority’s cadence Dungey. The warm-up combines exercises such as eight-on-a-hand and accent-tap, which are used to work on varied articulation, and diddle exercises. Most of these exercises are only in the snare drum and multi-tenor sections because they would benefit from these exercises the most. Another focus of this warm-up is to develop uniformity of style, ensemble timing, and control much like the warm-up written above. The tenor and bass drum parts are written for them to develop both their individual timing, reading skills, and cohesion because their musical relationship is based on call and response. Moreover, the tenor/bass drum relationship in sections without tonal bass drums closely mimics the relationship between the high drums and the lower drums in a tonal bass drum section in that their rhythms usually fit together.
The cymbal part is written to take the players through the various playing techniques used: the choke/chip, which gives the sound of a closed hi-hat, the fusion/hi-hat, which gives the sound of an open hi-hat being struck and then closed while still vibrating, and the crash. I have found that techniques such as the taps and zings, which are extended techniques used to get different sounds and overtones out of the marching cymbals, are usually not used in traditional-style drumlines. This is possibly because they do not project very well, but what traditional cymbal players lack in extended technique, they make up for in pageantry. For example, measures eight and nine require the cymbal players to complete the named flash in a certain number of beats before their next rhythm, thus necessitating the students to work on their rhythmic accuracy and their flash timing. This is done to prepare them for their flash sequences during cadences and songs that they will encounter throughout season. Measures eight and nine were written to challenge the students in hopes of improving their playing ability and speed.

**Cadence Construction**

I divide cadences into three types, feature/stand cadences, traditional cadences, and marching cadences. The construction of these cadences relies heavily on the creation of a groove functions as the central basis for each piece. This groove can be adapted from a song heard on the radio or created from new ideas put together by the composer(s). To the trained ear, it is possible to hear the musical preferences of the composer through these rhythmic choices.

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Often, the percussion arranger creates a piece from one initial groove as described by Tim Greene above. This inspiration can come from anywhere i.e., the lyrical style of the arranger’s favorite rapper, a drum pattern from a popular song, other cadences from the section’s repertoire or even lines from popular DCI ensembles such as “The Authority’s” adaptation of “Flamus” written for the Santa Clara Vanguard.

Unlike corps-style schools, most traditional schools’ cadences are the results of cooperative composition between the drumline instructor and the students. Some instructors will create entire cadences on their own, but this makes up a small percentage of the section’s repertoire depending on the school. There are drumlines such as “Drum Phi” of Virginia State whose material is mostly written by their instructor Elisha Powell. This is not representative of all MEAC style drumlines Pedro Orey, for example, stated in our interview that he will allow his students at Bethune Cookman to compose material for features.

**Feature/Stand Cadences**

Feature or stand cadences are meant to show off the drumline’s playing ability. They may include sectional solos as a means of transition to another section of music. MEAC and SWAC style drumlines both include difficult material in their construction of these cadences. The difference between SWAC and MEAC feature cadences is their specific writing styles. The MEAC style features a homophonic rhythm with a clear subject or theme. In fact, Professor Orey stated that the features that he writes are “goal

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6 Elisha Powell, interviewed by author, via zoom, January 6, 2022
7 Pedro Orey, interviewed by author, via zoom December 8, 2021
oriented” in that each feature cadence is geared toward emulating a style or showcasing a movement, visual effect, or solos.8 On the other hand the SWAC style also has a clear theme and contrapuntal rhythmic lines but it is unclear if each cadence has a goal in mind other than impressing their audience.

To further explain feature cadence construction, I have composed a feature cadence in the SWAC style based on the initial groove is taken from “What’s It Gonna Be” by Busta Rhymes featuring Janet Jackson.

![Drum Set](image1)

![Dr.](image2)

**Figure 6.3 showing the drum pattern to Busta Rhymes’ “What’s It Gonna Be?”**

![Snare Drum](image3)

![Marching Tenor Drums](image4)

![Marching Bass Drum](image5)

![Marching Cymbals](image6)

![Quints](image7)

**Figure 6.4 Showing the first four measure of “Janet”, a cadence written in the SWAC style.**

The first four measures of this cadence are based on the beginning of the song with the bass drum and snare drum rhythms being almost identical to the those in the

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8 Pedro Orey, interviewed by author, via zoom December 8, 2021
song with the cymbals accenting the bass drum rhythms just as they do in the song. The single tenor and bass drum rhythms call and respond to each other throughout the duration of the cadence to establish a foundational groove.

![Figure 6.5](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=brdH7ByHFII)  

The composition of the snare drum’s part is a mix of both traditional and hybrid rudiments. Meanwhile the multi-tenors double the rhythm of the snare drum until measure five where they have a drum-to-drum fill to cover the spaces left by the other drums. This seems to be a common function of the multi-toms that can be heard by various HBCU drumlines in cadences by HBCUs such as Alabama A&M University’s “S.T.I.X.”

The cymbal part is one that employs techniques frequently used by traditional-style cymbal players such as the choke denoted by the notes with “x” noteheads, and fusions denoted by an eighth note with a traditional notehead tied to an eighth note with

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an “x” notehead. Crashes are denoted by notes with traditional noteheads. The rhythm is a mix of hi-hat patterns heard in this song as well as other hip-hop music and accent figures that accompany the bass drum rhythm.

**Marching Cadences**

Now that we understand how the groove is adapted and arranged into a cadence, we must now discuss the marching cadence. The purpose of any marching cadence is to move the band from point to point. These cadences can be as simple as a loop played by the snare line seen in figure 6.6 play by HBCUs such as Southern University and can range to fully orchestrated musical compositions.

![Figure 6.6 Illustrating the written form of “Police” played by “Funk Factory.”](image)

These street beats often feature dance moves and stick tricks, especially when standing still. This is not only to foster school spirit but to create the partylike atmosphere that is common with HBCU events.

The cadences are often arranged into a sequence or series that can be played from top to bottom or can be played out of order. These sequences can feature as many as ten cadences musically sewn together to keep the band moving and to minimize the need to the continuous selection of cadences while marching. One other aspect of these marching cadences is that they are not technically challenging since the players are in constant motion and cannot to play intricate rhythms. Another aspect that hinders the playing is the marching style used. The knee lift that is used by snare drummers and leg mounted

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10 Pedro Orey, interviewed by author, via zoom December 8, 2021
11 Reginald McDonald, interviewed by Author, in person, October 24th, 2021
single tenor drummers is usually parallel to the playing surface often getting in the way of the stick. Yet it is not uncommon for drumlines to play more intricate marching cadences once they form what is known as a “tunnel” as shown in figure 6.7.

![Figure 6.7 showing the tunnels formed by Southern University’s Human Jukebox(left) and Norfolk State University’s Spartan Legion(right).](image)

The tunnel consists of two parallel lines formed by the drumline through which the rest of the band members march. This creates an avenue for wind instrumentalists and auxiliary groups keeping them in step with one another as well as for of security so that spectators will not break through the ranks of the band. According to Dr. Reginald McDonald, Director of Bands at Tennessee State University, the tunnel serves as a form of motivation for band members to put more energy and enthusiasm into their marching. It is also can be used as percussion showcase and to draw attention from fans, alumni, and media personnel to the band as they march into the stadium.

One popular basis for marching cadences is Meco’s “Other Galactic Funk” from their album *Music Inspired by Star Wars and Other Galactic Funk*. There are at least four HBCU drumlines who have cadences based on the music of this track: War and

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12 Reginald McDonald, interviewed by author, in person, October 24, 2021
13 Reginald McDonald, interviewed by author, in person, October 24, 2021.
Thunder, The Authority, Drum Phi, and “Million Dollar Funk Squad.” After listening to the track, it is easy to hear how it was transcribed and adapted to fit the purposes of a marching cadence. The track begins with a drum solo, that features a driving bass drum rhythm and a snare drum solo before the bass guitar, horns, and synthesizer join. This intro seen below can be heard in its adapted form in War and Thunder’s cadence Bear, Drum-Phi’s Middle Finger, and by the Million Dollar Funk Squad in their drum major cadence.

6.8 Showing the drum pattern of Meco’s “Other Galactic Funk” which served as the inspiration for of marching cadences at different universities.

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17 Elisha Powell, January 5th, 2022, 0:00-2:07, video, https://www.facebook.com/messenger_media?thread_id=1080363674&attachment_id=316737167038763&message_id=mid.%24cAAAAABp2buqEW7r24I-KnTf75wad
18 Ryan Hardy, “Spartan Legion Marching Band 10/30/21#nsu #spartanlegion”, October 30th, 2021, 8:26-10:00, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6Rd42Kbzqo
After the brief melody by the synthesizer, the track returns to a drum solo. This second solo, shown in figure 6.8, is where the main theme of these cadences is adapted from and can be heard by every collegiate drumline who plays this cadence. One interesting find is how drumlines such as “Million Dollar Funk Squad” and “Drum-Phi” orchestrated this main theme that is shown in the melodic toms in figure 6.6. for their multi-tenor lines. Meanwhile drumlines such as “War and Thunder” and “The Authority” voiced this theme on the single tenor drum.
Marching cadences can also be based on a song or rhythmic theme found in other instrumental music. Examples of this adaptation can be found in the cadence “Jack” as played by Southern University (figure 6.7). Johnny Lee Lane, the cadence draws its inspiration from a flute solo from the Virgin Islands. The flute rhythm was adapted to the tenor drum which carries the theme for the entirety of the cadence while the other sections play responding rhythms. The cadence has a B section then loops back to the beginning.

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Johnny Lee Lane, interviewed by author, via zoom, October 21, 2021
Figure 6.10 showing “Funk Factory’s” cadence “Jack.”
"Jungle Beat"
as played by Jackson State University's"War and Thunder"

Figure 6.11 Showing “War and Thunder’s” cadence “Jungle Beat.”
By contrast, figure 6.8 highlights War and Thunder’s adaptation of Jack which they called Jungle Beat. Both “Jack” and “Jungle Beat” begin the same with what can be described as the theme being played on the single tenor drum accompanied by cymbal chokes on the “and” of beats one through four and bass drums responding to the given tenor drum rhythm on the “and” of beat 4. The bass drum rhythms are different between the schools, but they provide the same effect. Funk Factory’s version is a bit simpler in
texture due in part to their lack of a multi-tom section. At measure nine, instead of chokes, the cymbals of Funk Factory’s arrangement move to simple, whole note crashes whereas War and Thunder moves to fusions when the snare’s consistent rhythms begin thus allowing the snares to be the only driving rhythmic figure that is presented over the tenor drum’s theme.

War and Thunder’s version is a bit denser because they have a multi-tom section, and every section is playing within the first eight measures of the cadence. The main differences between the two cadences lie in the writing of the snare rhythms. “Funk Factory’s” version is less rhythmically dense than the snare rhythms of War and Thunder. Moreover, “War and Thunder’s” snare writing seems to dance around the tenor drum theme. Looking toward the end of both cadences, they both end with a quasi-drum fill that begins with the snares and ends with the bass drums, with Funk Factory returning to the beginning to the cadences as is their custom per Professor Lane\textsuperscript{20} while “War and Thunder” continues to another cadence within their marching series\textsuperscript{21} further strengthening the link between the two cadences. Based on the density of the War and Thunder’s parts in comparison to those of Funk Factory, it is safe to assume that Funk Factory’s version was written before War and Thunder’s.

**Traditional Cadences**

The third type of cadence is the traditional cadence. These are cadences that were composed in the decades prior to the twenty-first century that have remained in the section’s repertoire. These cadences can serve as a link between the current drumline and

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\textsuperscript{20} Johnny Lee Lane, interviewed by author, via zoom, October 21, 2021.
\textsuperscript{21} Marchingsport, “Jackson State Marching into Southern Heritage Classic 2015”, September 17\textsuperscript{th}, 2015, video, 0:00-0:45, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=O7BZjnRMox8&t=45s
those who came before them. These traditional cadences may include a section’s marching sequence from the tradition of the day. In my experience, most traditional cadences are simpler in nature and may not always reflect the current state of the craft or the skill of the current drumline. The largest determining factor is examining the section’s tradition through either sound or video recordings, which serve as a chronicle of the section’s material. One instance is the cadence “Color Blind” by Sudden Impact.

Members of this section can be seen as early as 1992\textsuperscript{22} and as late as 2018\textsuperscript{23} playing this cadence. There are times where these “easier” older cadences have been musically upgraded as discussed by Dr. Lawhorn when reflecting on the style of his alma mater, Prairie View A&M University. Lawhorn states that the snare drum parts at the time were simpler in nature, which is typical of most ensemble’s traditional or “old school” cadences.\textsuperscript{24} Over time the students modified and made new snare parts to fit the high skill level of the students at that time.

Johnny Lee Lane states that the writing style differentiates traditional cadences from modern cadences.\textsuperscript{25} Lane says that the traditional style was adapted from the Big-10 conference during the early days of many HBCU programs, much like the uniforms and performance practices.\textsuperscript{26}

According to Professor Lane, traditional cadence construction consists of a main theme and one or more sections in which the theme is developed.\textsuperscript{27} This style closely

\textsuperscript{22} Pharaoh Uno, “Sudden Impact December 9 1992 - Color Blind”, September 17\textsuperscript{th}, 2014, video recording, 0:00-2:40, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=txD419qql_Q
\textsuperscript{23} Stylistic, “BCU Percussion Section 2018- Color blind”, October 9\textsuperscript{th}, 2018, video recording, 0:00-2:20, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XzkOEyFFTA&t=81s
\textsuperscript{24} Lamon Lawhorn, interviewed by author, via zoom, November 22, 2021
\textsuperscript{25} Johnny Lee Lane, interviewed by author, via zoom, October 21, 2021.
\textsuperscript{26} ibid
\textsuperscript{27} ibid
mirrors forms used for the composition of music of the Classical era. There are two ways to find a theme for a cadence written in traditional style. The first is to find a theme presented in a song. During the interview, Professor Lane discussed the basis for the creation for the Tennessee State University cadence “Detroit Life” with the theme being taken from the guitar part of Chic’s “Le Freak” better known at Freak Out. Upon investigating this claim, it’s clear that Lane took the bass guitar rhythm from the verse and added the lyrics on top of it as shown below.

![Figure 6.12 showing the vocal and bass guitar rhythm to Chic’s “Le Freak.”](image)

It could be said that he combined the rhythm of the electric guitar and the bass guitar heard during the chorus of the song as they closely resemble the rhythm played by the bass guitar during the verse of the song. Lane then placed this figure within the bass drum part. He used the “freak out” rhythm as the basis for a snare drum part. Last, he filled in the spaces with themes within the tenor drum and cymbal parts. The motives are

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28 Johnny Lee Lane, interviewed by author, via zoom, October 21, 2021.
then developed throughout the five-part cadence with various figures that often imitate each other. I have included each section of the cadence to show each section’s motivic development.

**Detroit Life**

Johnny Lee Lane

Figure 6.13 showing Professor Lane’s arrangement of “Le Freak” into a cadence called “Detroit Life.”

The first section shown above is the intro, with the main Freak Out theme being played by the bass drums. The introduction of this cadence builds upon itself with a different sub-section entering every four measures. The tenor drums are the second section to enter, followed finally by the snare drums and cymbals, who enter together. This music for the bass drum, tenor drum, and crash cymbals maintains the foundation of the cadence as the snare drum begins to develop its theme, in sections A and B as shown below. Although the writing for the bass, tenor, and cymbal sections seems mundane, it
represents the “pocket” or fundamental groove of the electric and bass guitar along with that of the drum set found in “Freak Out”.

The rest of the writing changes in section C, going from staying in the “pocket” to a form of imitation between the four sections as shown below beginning with the snare drum.

Section D functions as a coda.
Chapter 7

Reading Music Versus Rote Teaching

According to Teddy Hall, the African traditions of rote-teaching have remained prevalent with most HBCU drumlines.\(^1\) One question that arises is whether this tradition was the cause for the decline in cadences being physically written via writing utensil and paper or notation software or if it has remained prevalent because of a lack in reading skills. According to drumline instructors such as Shawn Hall,\(^2\) drumline instructor for “Million Dollar Funk Squad”, Pedro Orey,\(^3\) and Elisha Powell, most drumlines who play in the MEAC style use a combination of sheet music and rote teaching.\(^4\) When asked about how they balance the two, Shawn states that at his university, most of the band music and drumline cadences are delivered via sheet music and they teach their traditional cadences by rote. Powell further validates this notion stating that his students of “Drum-Phi” learn material in the same manner. With the heavy reading emphasis of MEAC style drumlines, it leaves one wondering about the audition processes of these schools. Both Hall and Powell state that students who cannot read can be admitted into the ranks of the drumline if their skill level is on par with the standards of the section and that their reading skills will be sharpened as they continue to learn with the drumline.\(^5\)

Both my research and experience as a drumline instructor have shown that SWAC style drumlines teach material by rote the majority of the time. This is not to say that members of these sections cannot read but that the emphasis is on rote teaching rather

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1 Teddy Hall, interviewed by author, via zoom, September 28, 2021.
2 Shawn Hall, interviewed by author, via Facebook, January 28th, 2022.
3 Elisha Powell, interviewed by author, via zoom, January 6, 2022.
4 Pedro Orey, interviewed by author, via zoom December 8, 2021.
than teaching by sheet music. Elisha Powell points out that the lack of record keeping of the section’s material causes several issues.\(^6\) These issues are compounded with the section’s traditional cadences, which in some cases may never have been written down; therefore, current members and instructors must reach out to former members for the material these members may not remember the cadence, or even worse, may remember the differently from their counterparts, which further adding to the confusion. Other issues that arise with the lack of written music occur during the learning process. When music is written out, the student has something tangible to refer to when learning music versus trying to decipher recordings of other students.\(^7\) Furthermore, written music lessens the chance of students learning the piece wrong because of a mistake within the reference recording because every nuance and rhythmic embellishment ideally would be on the paper.\(^8\)

One question that arose during research whether if the ability to read music enhances the student’s creative ability when constructing cadences? According to William Earvin Sr., Conn-Selmer Educational Support Manager for the Southeast and Director of the Conn-Selmer HBCU Collective, the answer is yes.\(^9\) Dr. Earvin states that when students can read music, they can understand and analyze what is occurring in the music that they are playing thus allowing them to move higher on Bloom’s Revised Taxonomy pyramid shown below.\(^10\)

\(^{6}\) Elisha Powell, interviewed by author, via zoom, January 6, 2022  
\(^{7}\) ibid  
\(^{8}\) ibid  
\(^{9}\) William Earvin Sr., interviewed by author, February 5, 2022  
Using Dr. Earvin’s statements, I was able to conclude that when students do not learn to read music, they are essentially skipping all or part of the understand, analyze, and evaluate tiers which are needed before the student can effectively create. This does not mean that creation is not possible, because it is done and at a high level in many high schools, colleges, and universities with a traditional-style drumline. However, if traditional-style marching percussion is to continue to move forward, drumline instructors must push for a greater understanding of the craft, which may include taking the drumline into the classroom and teaching them about what they are playing and creating so that when members create new material, it will come from a place of greater understanding.

Although reading music has strong benefits to the drumline, it is not the fault of SWAC style drumlines for not using this tool as a method of teaching on a consistent basis because, as Teddy Hall points out, musical literacy for percussionists is not taught on a consistent basis at the middle and high school levels. Therefore, when students audition for college, although all of them may be tremendously talented, only a

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11 Teddy Hall, interviewed by author, via zoom, September 28, 2021
percentage of them can read music, and an even smaller percentage of them are strong readers.\textsuperscript{12} As a collegiate band director, I have observed students at both ends of the musical literacy spectrum. One interesting and valid point that Hall also makes is that all strong readers are not the best players, meaning that instructors should not prioritize students who can read over students who cannot, because, as is often the case with some SWAC style drumlines, the students who either are not strong readers or cannot read music at all have better technique, skill and dexterity than those who can.\textsuperscript{13} Other schools in this region prioritize reading for all instrumentalists and produce amazing talent. To combat this problem, Hall suggests teaching students to read while also building their chops so that when they get to college, they will not have to play catch up.\textsuperscript{14} Hall also suggests that even if a section’s material is written down, the sheet music only serves as a guide and the true interpretation of the notes and rhythms can only be taught by rote.\textsuperscript{15} This notion is corroborated by Taurus Lovely, who, in an interview on the HBCU Drumline Talk Podcast, stated that drumlines, specifically Florida Agricultural and Mechanical University’s “Z-28” would alter the written material because anyone who could read music could play their cadences and sound like them.\textsuperscript{16} This alteration came in the form of an accenting the last three notes of any metered roll played. This belief is one that was shared by drumlines at other schools, because it can be heard at multiple schools.

\textsuperscript{12} Teddy Hall, interviewed by author, via zoom, September 28, 2021.
\textsuperscript{13} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{14} Teddy Hall, interviewed by author, via zoom, September 28, 2021.
\textsuperscript{15} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{16} Taurus Lovely and Tovah Lovely, interview by Ricardo Reese and Elisha Powell, \textit{HBCU Drumline Talk}, March 10\textsuperscript{th}, 2021, on YouTube, video, 31:11, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yu7ncNABNqk\&t=2226s.
including TSU, NCAT, and Southern University. A prime example of this can be seen with Southern University’s “Police” shown again here.

Figure 7.2 Illustrating the written form of “Police” played by “Funk Factory.” Although this figure looks simple, after observing various video recordings of their drumline playing this loop it is clear that the rhythm is swung and that there is a slight accelerando within the first three partials of sixteenth note grouping with an instant ritardando before arriving at the last partial of the sixteenth-note grouping and continuing into beat four. This protective technique is one that has worked for decades to keep the different sounds of HBCU drumlines exclusive to that respective group; in the age of YouTube, however any drumline wanting to mimic the sound and material of another can do so with or without sheet music.

TSU sophomore Corey Walker, who also marched in a corps-style program in high school, shines a different light on some actual benefits of learning by rote as opposed to learning by sheet music.17 When asked about the differences between the two, Walker states that when learning music by rote, it actually leaves more room for interpretation.18 Going further, Walker states that he believes rote teaching answers all of the questions that arise during learning by sheet music by being able to see “someone who [he] will be standing beside” play the section of music that they’re learning which also makes for a more intimate learning experience.19

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18 Ibid.
19 Ibid.
Exclusivity within the HBCU Marching Band Community

One must ask, why does the need for such exclusivity exist within the HBCU percussion community? A possible reason could be that because of the spread of knowledge from teacher to student that is perpetuated and because teachers move between universities, a lot of HBCU band programs got their start by mimicking the style of another university and adding their own twist on the parent band’s traditions. Therefore, this need for exclusivity is one that exists solely for the benefit of the students and alumni to be able to differentiate between styles and approaches to music by different bands. One example of a “parent band” is that of FAMU’s Marching 100 under the direction of the late William P. Foster. Dr. Foster’s innovations on the field set the standard for band pageantry, which he detailed in his book *Band Pageantry*. Directors who were contemporaries of Dr. Foster began to take notice and adopt those practices for bands of their own. One of these practices is that of the “dance routine” in which Dr. Foster was the first to employ as a means to impress the audience. An interesting finding is that schools with a younger band program have a greater propensity to mimic or even adopting the material or performance practices of another school. This is possibly because the band director who began the program is a product of another university and instead of choosing to build their program’s musical repertoire from the “ground up”, they instead took material from their alma mater and introduced it to their budding program. Examples of this can be seen with Albany State University’s Marching Rams.

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21 William P. Foster, interviewed by Carmen Cummings, September 6th, 2021, YouTube, video, 6:01, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cjG8M-x4GjM
Show Band playing the same version of “Let’s Go” as Bethune Cookman University’s Marching Wildcatters.22

According to William Earvin Sr., the need for exclusivity is bigger than the HBCU band traditions.23 He goes further to state that all artists strive to have their own sound, using the example of artists singing the same song but sounding completely different, an obvious illustration being Whitney Houston singing “I Will Always Love You” and sounding vastly different than the original recording by Dolly Parton.24

**Spread of Influence**

Certain HBCU drumlines have cadences closely that resemble each other. At first, it would seem that one school “stole” the material of another school more likely, this phenomenon can be attributed to the migration of band directors, and percussion instructors from school to school. Another cause of this is the spread of students graduating from one program and going on to develop band programs of their own. Directors who fit into this category include Benjamin J Butler, who graduated from the then Tennessee Agricultural and Industrial University and developed what became known as the “Ocean of Soul” at Texas Southern University in 1969.25 Clifford Watkins, who graduated from Clark Atlanta University,26 had a hand in the development of both the South Carolina State University Marching Band and the Tennessee State University

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23 William Earvin Sr., interviewed by author, February 5, 2022
24 ibid
marching band. Johnny Lee Lane graduated from Southern University and was instrumental in the performance practice of the Tennessee State University drumline organizing their marching sequence and writing many of the cadences still played today.

Professor Lane discusses that there were three main band programs from which everyone else borrowed things, which were Southern University, Florida A&M University, and Tennessee State University. He also note the adaptation of practices used during his matriculation at Southern University for the drumline at Tennessee State University, such as having a central snare loop that serves as a “home base” during the marching sequence called The Beat. According to Lane, he organized the TSU marching sequence in a way in which every cadence was played twice before returning to “The Beat” because that is the way the sequence was played at Southern University. Another attribute that Lane borrowed from his college years was the “little note-big note system” taught to him by his former percussion instructor Don Dillon. This system implemented implied crescendi from the beginning of each rhythmic grouping driving toward the last note.

Fig. 7.3 depicting a conventional 5-stroke roll in mm. 1 and a 5-stroke roll using the little-note big-note system discussed by Prof. Lane in mm.2.

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28 Johnny Lee Lane, interviewed by author, via zoom, October 21, 2021
29 Johnny Lee Lane, interviewed by author, via zoom, October 21, 2021
30 ibid
31 Johnny Lee Lane, interviewed by author, via zoom, October 21, 2021
32 ibid
Has It Always Been This Way?

The art of traditional-style marching band and marching percussion has been slow to evolve compared to corps-style marching bands. Nicholas Thomas, Assistant Band Director and Coordinator of Music Teacher Education at FAMU, thinks the reasons for this include the past practices of segregation and their effects on both the black and white communities. These effects included self-segregation long after the legal practices of segregation had ended as we still see today in black churches, schools, and neighborhoods as Thomas points out. These effects also permeate the styles of music listened to by people of these communities. Evidence of this can be heard during football games, with traditional-style marching bands playing music popular within their communities. It is rare that you will hear a rock song played at a sporting event of a predominately black school. Meanwhile, music at corps-style schools tends to be more diverse in genre but ultimately caters to their audience. Fortunately, inclusion and diversity have been a focus of the marching communities of both the corps and traditional styles with formerly segregated ensembles becoming more and more diverse groups each year.

Another reason that Dr. Thomas points out for the slowed evolution of traditional-style band programs is the practice of self-isolation, especially when it comes to the

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33 Nicholas Thomas, interviewed by author, via zoom, February 14th, 2022
34 ibid
hiring of directors and staff. \(^{35}\) Dr. Thomas believes the mentality of “no one can take care of us like us” can be just as damaging as it is helpful. \(^{36}\) On one hand, hiring from within the alumni base allows for the maintenance of the tradition of the program as well as an assumed dedication to the well-being of the band program and school. Conversely, the maintenance of tradition can cause a program to become stagnant because this is the way that they’ve always done things. Furthermore, hiring from strictly within the alumni base sometimes neglects the possibility of there being a more qualified candidate from another university. As Dr. Thomas points out, most times hiring the best candidate whether they an alum or not is what moves programs forward because the ideal candidate will bring fresh ideas and approaches to the program. An example of these fresh ideas that Dr. Thomas uses is the field drills used by his marching bands. Thomas further states that most of the universities in the United States that have a corps-style program have evolved from the four-person squad drills featuring movements such as the step-two and creating formations found in William C. Moffit’s *Patterns of Motion* to a more modern approach with band members moving individually and forming different forms on the field. \(^{37}\)

![Image](image.png)

Fig. 7.4 Showing the traditional designs of Bill Moffit performed by the University of Houston’s marching band (top) in comparison to Michigan State University (bottom) showing the complex designs performed by most corps style band programs.

\(^{35}\) Nicholas Thomas, interviewed by author, via zoom, February 14\(^{th}\), 2022.

\(^{36}\) Ibid.

\(^{37}\) Nicholas Thomas, interviewed by author, via zoom, February 14\(^{th}\), 2022; Moffit, William, *Patterns of Motion*, (Hal Leonard Publications, 1965).
Dr. Thomas echoes a section of *The Complete Marching Band Resource Manual* that discusses this original militaristic style that is evolved to include different “gimmicks” that ultimately transformed into the smooth glide stepped style that can be seen today from many corps-style bands.\(^38\) Meanwhile, most if not all traditional-style marching bands continue to use the four-person squad system to make their designs on the field.

![Image of band performing](image.jpg)

**Figure 7.5** Showing Miles College (left) and Benedict College (right) using the same patterns of motion that Moffit detailed in his book that are still used by HBCU bands today.

Dr. Thomas further states the practice of hiring the best candidate is one that larger predominantly white universities have mastered with the band directors at universities such as Purdue University\(^39\) and the University of Michigan being alumni of

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\(^{39}\) “Directors”, Purdue bands and Orchestras, Purdue, last modified 2022, [https://www.purdue.edu/bands/directors/](https://www.purdue.edu/bands/directors/).
other universities.\textsuperscript{40} Meanwhile, most traditional style programs only hire outside the alumni pool when there are no qualified or interested candidates.\textsuperscript{41}

This conclusion by Dr. Thomas presents the question of why traditional-style bands have not adopted at least the individual member movement system that the corps-style band programs have implemented. One thing to note is that the traditional-style halftime drills, which are usually based on concepts from Moffit’s books, feature patterns and recognizable shapes that seem to appeal more to the crowd. Going further, Andre Newsom, former Director of Bands at Whitehaven High School in Memphis, Tennessee, and current Assistant Band Director and Drill Writer for TSU’s Aristocrat of Bands, states that traditional-style band programs cannot completely forego the four-man squad movement patterns because everything from the music to the dance move is based on the concept of “sets of eight,” which are based on the marching style that these bands employ.\textsuperscript{42} Newsom goes further to state that a downside of this marching style is that it limits the time signatures in which these bands can perform while marching to 3/8, 6/8, 12/8, 2/4, and 4/4.\textsuperscript{43}

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Conclusion

The culture of HBCU drumlines, their musical preparation, and their performance practice is not one-sided, as we can see. HBCU marching percussion is an amalgamation of tradition and past experiences that form the various styles of traditional-style drumlines. For example, lines that have a more corps-style approach have teachers that either marched in a Drum Corps International ensemble or in a high school marching band that was modeled after one. These schools are also in areas where there are not many high schools that practice traditional-style marching percussion, such as Virginia State University. Meanwhile, HBCUs in the midsouth feature an aggressive, groove-centered approach that is the same at both the collegiate and high school levels because of the students continuing their education at schools with marching bands that suit their interests. No matter the playing style, drumlines at these HBCUs take these past experiences and combine them with dance moves and grooves to accomplish their main goal of entertaining their audience rather than adjudication.

Traditional-style marching percussion has evolved past its origins in many ways, including the playing styles, composition styles, playing implements, and in some cases, instruments. Traditional-style drumline members are always in pursuit of the latest techniques while maintaining the sound of their respective sections. This is done through observation, comparison, and discussion of the current trends of traditional-style marching percussion in internet groups, such as the Percussion connection on Facebook. This group serves as a blog, peer-to-peer tutoring group, and adjudication panel where members can offer tips on improvement and critiques. Furthermore, this document serves
as a snapshot depicting the current trends of HBCU percussion but as musical practices continue to evolve, so will the art of HBCU marching percussion.

As was discussed earlier, traditional-style performance practices do not solely lend themselves to the HBCUs that first adopted this style but to high schools in predominantly black regions of the country. This has occurred through the spread of ideals learned at the collegiate level by current or former members of that high school’s drumline that have pursued their education at a HBCU. Because of the development of social media outlets such as YouTube, traditional-style high school drumline members can also compare, contrast, learn from, and model themselves after any HBCU that they choose.

Although the culture and traditions of these ensembles are rich and span decades, they are not without controversy. There are indeed changes to the culture that should be and are currently being made, such as the push for musical literacy and appreciation of different approaches to performance practice and composition. Nevertheless, the flair and pageantry of traditional-style band programs and drumlines are unmatched and should not be looked down upon because they do not always play the same material or exhibit the same sonic concepts as modern or corps-style drumlines. However, if done at a high level, both styles exhibit amazing musical skill with the only dividing factor between the two being the preference of the listener.
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