

Motown Music and the Civil Rights Movement

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Motown Records, one of the most successful record labels during the African American Civil Rights Movement, was prominent in bridging white and black culture during troubled racial times in Detroit. Characterized by a combination of soul and pop, the “Motown Sound” aided in the battle to end racial discrimination towards African Americans via the use of powerful lyrics and catchy beats. The popularity of the songs and activism by the Motown artists themselves, ensured Motown played a major role in the Civil Rights Movement. “Motown Records and the Civil Rights Movement” aims to show just how crucial and indispensable of a role music played as a mechanism of hope and determination not only during the 50s and 60s for African Americans, but also today for so many minorities. Macklemore’s “Same Love” describes the prejudices that same sex couples experience in contemporary America with regard to same sex marriage. Macklemore’s popularity will help to influence a generation, similar to how Martha and the Vandellas’ “Dancing In The Street” was instrumental in influencing public opinion at the peak of the Civil Rights Movement. Activism through music promotes “Learning Throughout A Lifetime” because it is timeless in nature and it constantly strives for social change. In fall 2014 I won the History & Art History Department’s Annual McNitt Grant, which funded my research in Detroit at the Motown Museum and archives. My research and presentation will highlight how this happened in the 1960s in Detroit, Michigan and how it is still happening in the 2000s in Adrian, Michigan.