Reproducing U.S. Citizenship in **Blackboard Jungle: Race, Cold War Liberalism, and the Tape Recorder**

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It would be wrong to say that the principle of visibility governs all technologies of power.
—Michel Foucault, *Power/Knowledge*

Recording did not simply capture reality as it was; it aimed to capture a reality suitable for reproduction.
—Jonathan Sterne, *The Audible Past*

When English teacher Richard Dadier plunks his portable tape recorder down on his desk in MGM's *Blackboard Jungle* (1955), he expects more technological awe than he receives. Belying classed and raced assumptions, Dadier (Glenn Ford) tries to dazzle his working-class urban students with an emergent technology just entering the U.S. mainstream. Relying on the machine's novelty to provoke obedience—he does not explain his intentions, merely announcing, “This is a tape recorder”—Dadier becomes frustrated when the students resist, recognizing his microphone as a disciplinary tool rather than a means to self-expression. To thwart Dadier, classroom rebels Gregory Miller (Sydney Poitier) and Artie West (Vic Morrow) push heavily accented Pete Morales (Rafael Campos) to the microphone.

A minor character, Morales seems to exist for the sound of his voice alone. Framed by *Blackboard Jungle* as a cipher for dominant fears about postwar Puerto Rican migration to New York City, Morales's accent and timbre sonically symbolize concerns about migrants overwhelming and corrupting U.S. national identity. Described by the casting director and producer as “of Dominican origin but looks Porto-Rican [sic]” with an accent that was “good—a bit thick possibly,” Campos’s Morales was visually and sonically represented as an amalgamated “Latin” difference outside the bounds of black and ethnic white otherness, embodied by Miller and West. Indeed, Morales is Dadier’s loudest student—his “hey Teach” is the only phrase discernible amid the first assembly’s din—and his tone is extremely emotive, exclamatory, and animated.
Sonic cues of loudness, accent, and intonation characterize Morales as Dadier’s most foreign and least assimilable student.

Based on Evan Hunter’s 1954 best seller, Blackboard Jungle traces the violent first year of Dadier’s teaching career at North Manual Trades High School in New York; the film simmers with anxieties about race, America’s educational system, and postwar urban space. Within the representational, microcosmic space of the classroom, Dadier—returning vet and G.I. Bill recipient—is a prototype of (white male) middle-class citizenship, a postwar liberal determined to reproduce a class of poor black, brown, and ethnic white “screaming animals” in his refurbished image. The plot follows Dadier’s determination to subdue Miller and West while sustaining verbal, emotional, and physical abuse. Despite being bloodied and backtalked—and almost losing his unborn son to West’s cruel pranks—he stays the course, winning over Miller and weeding out West in a final showdown symbolizing the classroom’s stakes as nothing short of the nation itself: after West slices Dadier with a switchblade, the teacher watches his students, led by Miller, disarm the miscreants with the classroom flagpole.

Immensely popular in its time, Blackboard Jungle took itself seriously as a realistic representation of dangers facing American schools during the cold war, even as the film’s preferred narrative of social control failed to quell its subversive imagery, often emulated by audiences. As the film was debated at U.S. Senate subcommittee hearings, school board meetings, and local censor boards, internal memos fretted that its representation of teenaged dissent “could readily be used to further Commie propaganda.” While my investigation here acknowledges the film’s failure to contain North Manual’s rebellion, I am most interested in the conditions producing resistance, especially Blackboard Jungle’s reliance on aural cues to signify and penalize racial and national otherness, using sound to mark the boundaries of the postwar American nation. At a time when racism continued under the banner of colorblindness and citizens were urged to remain vigilant for “enemies within,” “Reproducing U.S. Citizenship” argues that listening practices, shaped in concert with developing sound reproduction technologies like the tape recorder, formed a key arena in which narratives of difference were constructed, edited out, and resisted in the name of American national identity. In Blackboard Jungle—where “music and sound are major characters”—the tape recorder scene exemplifies the sonic edge to cold war ideologies of race, gender, technology, and citizenship.

Relatively novel in the mid-1950s, the magnetic tape recorder arrived via existing social constructions of listening and desires for recording—particularly preservation, documenting, and archiving—and enabled an array of new sonic protocols: (re)construction, editing, (multi)tracking, surveillance, selective utilization, and erasure. These possibilities infused the recorder with meaning as it moved from the audiophilic margins to the middle-class mainstream, and the durability and portability of tape enabled unprecedented reproductive capabilities that resonated with larger cultural anxieties about various kinds of reproduction during the early cold war: biological, educational, political, cultural, and national. In a moment of violent global flux, Americans worried about reproducing the nation as an appropriately unified citizenry and exceptional world power. With an explosion of slogans like “Hear Yourself!,” “LISTEN: You have never heard music so vibrant—so clear!,” and “Record, Playback—voice and music—Everywhere . . . Anytime,” the tape recorder materially manifested dominant cultural shifts in understanding reproduction; the term took on valences of progress, connoisseurship, control, and perfectibility. If the nineteenth-century invention of recording technology was directed primarily toward preserving the “voices of the dead,” the tape recorder’s key interventions in the 1950s concerned its reproductive influence on the living.

Enhancing selective reproduction, the tape recorder embodied the listening ear of the largely white, male, middle-class aficionados who purchased them. The listening ear—a term I use to represent the norming of individual auditory experience by dominant ideologies—deems some sounds worthy of preserving, archiving, and reproducing, while marginalizing, recontextualizing, editting out, and sometimes erasing others. An aggregate of representational discourses that provided listening instruction, both subtle and overt, the American listening ear was disciplined during the cold war as a ruthless editor of self and others, processing dominant ways of sounding as default—natural, normal, desirable, and reproducible—while deeming alternate listening and sounding aberrant. Akin to “a constitutive constraint,” the listening ear is a socially constructed ideological system that produces but also regulates cultural ideas about sound. Even as alternative, nonmimetic recording practices arose during the same period, such as Pierre Schaeffer’s hypermixed musique concrète or Tony Schwartz’s “sono-montages” of multietnic New York City, they struggled to unsettle the existing conventions of the listening ear that structured the use of audio technologies and the meaning of sound, reorganizing bodies and voices into categories of assimilable/unassimilable, American/other, sound/noise.

Blackboard Jungle represents North Manual’s students as noisy, othered bodies rather than American listening ears. Aligning with cold war discourses of progress, achievement, and exceptionality, the expanded call for careful, selective reproduction—of appropriate sounds and proper citizens—contrasted sharply with racialized imagery of rote replication and biology dangerously out
of control. Sci-fi horror films like *Them!* (1954), which depicted American cities threatened by an insect swarm that “multiplies faster than it can be killed,” represent an extreme version of invasion via replication; however, Laura Briggs’s work shows connections between such hyperbolic discourse and depictions of postwar Puerto Rican migration—blamed, of course, on the island’s alleged overpopulation—that created a moral panic about “excessive Puerto Ricans” overwhelming the country with “problems and poverty.” Representations of indiscriminate and impoverished replication abound in *Blackboard Jungle*, which “depend[ed] in large part on national narratives circulating protectively and anxiously around the always already crisis of the reproductive capability of whiteness.” When one teacher is shocked that his students do not know multiplication, another sneers, “of course not, all they ever multiply is themselves.” This remark racializes North Manual’s student bodies, barring them from appropriate, nationalized reproduction, with its shadings of progress and self-control, because their irrepressible biology distracts and dooms them to mindlessly propagate flawed copies. Dadier’s use of the tape recorder is both an intervention in and a confirmation of the image of North Manual’s students as mindless mass multipliers rather than agents capable of appropriately reproducing themselves and others as citizens.

All the more symptomatic for surviving *Blackboard Jungle’s* radical translation from novel to screen, the tape recorder scene plays a major role in the film’s cultural politics and exemplifies how tape technology’s mainstreaming facilitated standards of postwar masculinity and citizenship through sound and listening. Existent critical work on the film says very little about the tape recorder and even less about Dadier’s decision to isolate, rather than reproduce, Morales’s Spanish-inflected speech. Faced with a disorderly, multiracial classroom that looks and sounds different from the desired American norm, Dadier’s brand of colorblind liberalism requires him to overlook the boys’ visible distinctions. However, his interaction with Morales reveals the extent to which he relies on his listening ear to identify audible markers of difference. On producing the recorder, Dadier characterizes the students’ talk as problematic and explicitly connects listening with a disciplined liberal tolerance—an agenda hinted at in the film but made explicit in the novel. But when Morales finishes his speech—thickly accented, rife with errors and obscenities—Dadier refuses even its remediation, angrily packing up the machine. While postwar racial liberalism held out the promise of tolerance, those who were lumped among the tolerated had to modulate their sound to be “suitable for reproduction,” hearing—and voluntarily rejecting—themselves as “a class of screaming animals.”

Marginalized white, black, and brown bodies were potentially assimilable, but only if they disciplined themselves to listen and sound like accepted standards.

To articulate interconnections between postwar racialization, U.S. citizenship, and audio technology, I examine *Blackboard Jungle’s* representations through sound studies, critical race studies, cinema studies, and the history of technology. Because the tape recorder’s presence has been marginalized, I begin by detailing the cultural history of its emergence in the 1950s. I reconstruct the recorder’s classed, raced, and gendered “structure of feeling” and argue that it frequently functioned as a metonym for the reproduction of appropriately nationalized bodies. Then I analyze its appearance in *Blackboard Jungle* to show its cultural pervasiveness and mobilization as a disciplinary device and gatekeeping mechanism in the struggle to reproduce (white masculine) citizenship, a move that ultimately backfires even as it exposes sound and audio reproduction technologies as key modalities of national and racial identity formation.

**“Cherished Voices”: Technological Reproductions of Nation**

By 1955—the year of *Blackboard Jungle’s* release—home-recording practitioners were over 1 million strong; Concertone and Magneord pushed the tape recorder as a domestic fixture “as in refrigerators or automobiles.” While critics mentioning the recorder’s appearance in *Blackboard Jungle* treat it as random or having “no clear pedagogical purpose,” I argue there are overdetermined cultural assumptions about audio reproduction operating within the film. While Dadier’s teaching is unquestionably novel, there is something to his presumption that he can simply open the recorder’s lid and begin. After all, “users never come to technologies unprepared,” and “technologies are never neutral; they are always embedded in and generated by a cultural context.” The recorder’s capabilities for archiving, editing, and reproducing sound would have been palpable to contemporary audiences without explicit explanation, as entertainment use, audio fair hype, media coverage, educational adoption, and marketing campaigns had made the machine ubiquitous.

A commercial good that shaped (and was shaped by) American citizen-consumers, the tape recorder was partly a product of 1950s anxieties about distinguishing selective and perfectible reproduction from rote copying. The shift from disc and wire to tape facilitated a dramatically more active recording process and enabled something like “perfection” to be imagined, especially for musical reproduction; not only was sound quality markedly better—the longer-playing medium of tape could capture a wider frequency range with less multigenerational distortion—it was cheaper and easier to edit. Pioneered in the United States by Bing Crosby, magnetic tape gave entertainers relief from the relentless demands of live performance. Crosby invested heavily in
Ampex in 1947 after co-owners Jack Mullin and Bill Palmer recorded his program with an early prototype, swiftly editing out off-color jokes, combining numerous takes, and adding applause with only scissors and sticky tape. The show's quality improved, Crosby's ratings rose, and high fidelity tape recorders rolled off assembly lines. Multiple takes quickly became de rigueur, and postproduction cutting and pasting lent a sense of seamlessness and precision to tape reproductions. Sound recording became less about leaving a record, for better or for ill, and more about constructing and perfecting the output.

Connotations of perfectibility, discernment, and editorial control of the reproductive process were also present in amateur recordings. A 1954 article “Tape Recorders for Use in the Home” exemplifies intensified ideals of reproduction: “There is an undeniable thrill waiting for the music-lover who successfully tapes an outstanding performance. A much closer sense of participation and identification is possible with, let's say, a Toscanini reading lovingly recorded off the air as against the impersonal purchase of a Toscanini record in a store.” Selective, individualized, and artisanal, audio reproduction practices are depicted as beginning even before the “record” button is depressed. The selection of Toscanini as fit material to reproduce in the first place, for example, marks a certain type of classed selectivity, as does the ability to discern an “outstanding” performance worth reproducing from a mediocrity one best erased. The “thrill” of agency inherent in the mindful, “loving” act of crafting a “successful” reproduction of the best Toscanini is set against the “impersonal” act of purchasing a ready-made mass production, something anyone could do with a few bucks, little-to-no skill required. Tellingly, this passage links appropriately “outstanding” reproduction to feelings of “participation and identification,” the hallmarks of citizenship.

Importantly, however, re-articulations of reproduction as a set of skilled, individualized practices were never solely ascribed to technology alone, nor did they deviate too far from established social parameters. For all of their technological boosterism, hi-fi trades represented the tape recorder as beholden to “Your Ear: The Judge.” Manuals repeatedly assert “high fidelity equipment should always be bought on the basis of listening.” The 1955 Audio Fair guide informed audiophiles of their “good fortune to have the most accurate instrument known to science that can tell you whether or not you have made a wise selection . . . the human ear.” Playing up the sensitivity and uniqueness of their readers' listening habits, these articles characterized the tape recorder as the material manifestation of reproduction's control, selectivity, and discernment. However, as much as reproduction was individualized, hi-fi trades also went to great lengths to provide standards for readers to assess quality. “Despite the fact that hearing is a subjective process,” the Hi-Fi Manual asserted, “you can nevertheless approach your listening tests with logic and objectivity.” The agency and accuracy of one's listening abilities was thus interconnected with the “logic and objectivity” of scientific methods and emotional constraint. Disciplining one's self to normative standards—in essence, developing a listening ear—was represented as the cornerstone of subjectivity rather than its nemesis. The ear's potential idiosyncrasies could be indulged only after basic listening standards had been met. “Careful listening may dictate that you should shift an instrument here or there, or perhaps even move the mike slightly. But with this basic setup as a starting point, you won't be far off.” The discourse of listening in hi-fi coverage mirrored and informed their readers' postwar liberal mind-set toward reproduction. Individual differences can be tolerated—even indulged—but only if everyone shared a “starting point” and a “basic setup.”

Concern over defining and successfully reproducing the shared basics of American identity permeated the tape recorder's marketing. A symptomatic RCA print campaign (1954–55) brims with cherubic children cradling microphones, representing a discursive marriage between tape's reproductive technology and the proliferation of heteronormative white suburbia. A 1954 ad interweaves the performative vows of marital fidelity with the recorder's promise of hi-fi performance. Just as this handsome white heterosexual couple is sure to faithfully reproduce, so too, the ad suggests, will their recorder. Ad copy promises unmediated access to the “voices you cherish,” a past “reproduced tone-perfectly” that one can “live . . . again just as it happened.” The notion of selecting, archiving, and reproducing “cherished voices” at will fueled another installment, “You cherish his picture . . . why not his voice?” The freckle-faced boy holding the microphone suggests the “have and hear” couple's progeny and represents the voices deemed most desirable for taping. Even as RCA's campaign critiques photography as silent, these ads exemplify the 1950s American visual economy while constructing a sonic contour to whiteness, privileging it as the “cherished” visual norm and thoroughly intertwining it with recording technology. The ads also display one of tape's emergent “media protocols”: those who are visually “cherished” are always already suitable candidates for audio reproduction. The suitability standard held for gender, too, as Hi-Fi Manual declared the male voice “a good test for hi-fi systems” because it was “free from thinness or harshness,” deviant qualities ascribed to female voices.

Given Hi-Fi Manual's perspective, it is unsurprising that white middle-class men were the tape recorder's largest sales demographic in the mid-1950s; for these users, it defined and enhanced the listening ear's agency. Keir Kightley describes how marketing and fan-based discourses interpellated and gendered
users of hi-fi equipment as male. As ideological as it was gendered—Keight-
ley even calls it misogynist—media coverage “highlight[ed] the self-reliance,
iconoclasm, and risk-taking of the pathfinding high fidelity hobbyists-cum-
entrepreneurs,” often returning male veterans like Dadier who acquired technol-
gegnow-how during World War II and the Korean conflict.27 Coinciding
with suburbanization, the masculinizing of sound reproduction technology
was a postwar development enabling middle-class men a psychological escape
from domesticity while staking out space within it.28 Copious photographs
of cleverly engineered home installations in hi-fi magazines—speakers hung
over fireplaces, records protruding from bookcases—represent masculine uses
of hi-fi to exert power in postwar domestic space by controlling its ultimate
visual design and soundscape: “They will re-arrange furniture, install or remove
drapes, put down and take up carpets in their endless quest of optimum acoustic
conditions.”29 Tape recorders necessitated soundscape control, as enthusiasts
demanded “optimum acoustic conditions”—usually silence—to craft their
material for playback. Furthermore, tape’s relative affordability and the ability
to erase/record led to larger, yet paradoxically more selective, audio collections
that could be strategically employed to engineer and dominate the soundscape,
often at the expense of other(ed) sounds and others’ desires.

Advertisers and reviewers emphasized agency—available at a button’s
push—to entice the growing postwar suburban male market, accentuating
the control, discernment, and perfection coalescing in reproduction. RCA’s
campaign, for example, mentions using the recorder to archive radio shows
and play prerecorded music, but it prioritizes listening pleasure derived from
producing new content, decisively judging its lasting value, and mobilizing
playback for tactical (and often self-enhancing) reasons: “Blow Your Own
Horn!” says a 1956 ad, “then use the playback to improve your playing.”30

A tongue-in-cheek piece plumbing “The Psychology of the Hi-Fi Hobbyist”
explicitly masculinizes the ability to perfect self and others through audio
reproduction: “Women—the practical and realistic sex—are often perplexed
by the actions of men. . . . They overlook the compulsive urge (like the lemur
running into the sea or the salmon returning to spawn) toward the ultimate
perfection of the unperfectible [sic], realization of the unrealizable—complete
fidelity in sound reproduction.”31 Here audio reproduction redeems the baser
aspects of heteronormative male sexuality, severing it from “practical and
realistic” bodily needs and reattaching it to the aspirational intellectual quest
for perfecting sound fidelity, all the more noble for its quixotism.

The same discourses imbuing the tape recorder with cultural meaning
—reproductive, masculine, middle class—permeated Dadier’s classroom in
Blackboard Jungle, as he engages in his own quixotic mission to perfect his students using “cold war liberalism’s sophisticated strategy of social control.”32 Dadier, a character soundly in the hi-fi demographic, enlists the recorder in his struggle to reproduce, via his all-male class, a brand of masculine American liberal citizenship that occupies a “managerial” middle ground between old-school force, represented by the overbearing principal Mr. Warneke (John Hoyt), and contemporary stereotypes of progressive passivity, embodied in the retreating math teacher Joshua Edwards (Richard Kiley).33 Dadier’s middle-ground masculinity, compassionate and yet militarized, was amplified by Ford in the role, himself a soft-spoken veteran sporting a “butch haircut.”34 Ford built his career on playing “cold-faced heroes” in thrillers, westerns, and war pictures;35 however, Blackboard and Trial—another 1955 Ford vehicle featuring him as an anticommunist lawyer defending a Mexican teenager accused of murder (coincidentally played by Campos)—recast him as a benevolent crusader, earning him meeter roles and humanitarian awards from liberal organizations Optimists International and B’nai B’rith.

From day one, Dadier proffers himself as a model of American assimilation contrasting with the boys’ deftly maintained ethnicities. He simultaneously calls attention to his French ancestry and deems it vestigial when he writes “DA-DI-ER” on the board and tells the students in stern, standard English: “Pronunciation is a very important part of English; I’d hate to fail anyone who couldn’t pronounce my name.” Despite its French sound, Dadier’s once-ethnic name is subsumed under the banner of English, although he perhaps protests too much to defray his own potential difference.36 Famously, the students resist his lesson by transliterating Dadier to “Daddy-O,” a term originating in the multiethnic African American, Latino, and Asian zoot suit culture of the 1940s.37 Dadier refuses to acknowledge either his new nickname or the hipster shorthand “teach”: “Mr. Dadier. Say it!” he barks at West. Publicly making the students “say his name” is an audio power-play setting an important precedent: to be validated by Dadier’s listening ear, the boys must silence their own ethnic and racial(ized) soundings and, when spoken to, reproduce his pronunciation, grammar, and tone. Dadier’s demand for the boys to listen to him is a means to an end: he ultimately seeks to train the boys to listen as him.

Blackboard Jungle does not represent Dadier’s ability to embody and reproduce postwar masculinity as a foregone success, however, and his use of the tape recorder heightens the tension between liberal notions of empathy and cold war disciplinary ideals. Although Dadier exhibits strong desires for the kinds of skilled and controlled reproduction that tape recording enabled—“I thought if I could help to shape young minds,” he muses, “sort of sculpt lives, and by teaching, I’d be creating”—the film questions whether he is up to the task. After all, Dadier’s newborn son fights for his life while his classroom charges seemingly throw theirs away. While Dadier quips that if he is “going to be a lion tamer [he] should teach with a chair and a whip”—depicting his students as less-than-human while nodding to violent forms of social control—it is the tape recorder that he enlists as a hegemonic tool to “quiet a class of screaming animals” into appropriately reproduced national(ized) individuals. In contrast to a whip’s crude force, the recorder’s more subtle capacity for editorial selection and push-button erasure mirrors Dadier’s state-sanctioned power to choose students suitable for reproduction while eliminating undesirables. While the recorder at first mocks Dadier’s reproductive failures—Miller feminizes Dadier by asking if he brought “his cosmetics to school” inside its case—unveiling the machine shifts the sole reproductive burden from Dadier. Its presence in a public, inner-city classroom raises the implicit question of whether his students are fit material for reproduction at all.

And what of Dadier’s students? How might they have encountered the tape recorder and entered its constitutive discourses? What were their expectations that they distrusted its presence in the classroom? While agency saturated hi-fi marketing materials, mainstream coverage of the recorder’s emergence into American life illustrated that choice and control depended dramatically on which side of the microphone one sat.

Countering optimistic white middle-class narratives of agency, reproduction, and perfection were alternative concerns about the tape recorder’s potential as a tool of political, legal, economic, and educational coercion. Taping captured more than just family memories and music programs; it also facilitated new types of punitive aural evidence and allegedly indisputable proof that criminalized, marginalized, and otherwise divided deviants from “appropriate” citizens. Newfound surveillance capabilities were especially key; the U.S. Navy had developed “automatic and unattended sound recording for as long as 48 hours” by 1952.38 Debates raged over tape-enabled wiretapping throughout the 1950s, especially after several senators—including Eugene McCarthy—angered President Harry Truman by secretly tapping their phone conversations. Given heightened anxieties over communism’s domestic influence, even the United States’ most powerful could be unwittingly taped, sparking concerns about technological invasiveness. Facing the threat of eroding civil rights because of “tape recorders so compact they will fit into a coat pocket,” even conservative outlets like Time felt “free societies must deal with the danger that increasingly sensitive electronic eyes and ears may destroy personal freedom by annihilating privacy.” However, Time tempered its antisurveillance stance with fear—
“Government does need some power to balance the criminal’s new advantages, especially the advantages to conspiracy against the national security”—firmly aligning the power to record with the state.39

Constructed by Blackboard Jungle as juvenile criminals and dissenters, Dadier’s working class, inner-city students represent a key demographic targeted by state-sponsored recording technology. A spectacular black, brown, and ethnic white “sea of flesh and noise,”40 North Manual’s students display the sounding bodies of dissidents rather than properly self-editing listening ears. Deliberately characterizing the slumping, slouching, and babbling students as unfit for cold war citizenship, Blackboard bluntly contrasts them with a montage of a quiet, orderly, patriotic, and overwhelmingly white suburban school. Heavy-handed and tacky on after wrap to appease censors —so hastily that palm trees are visible in an exurb of New York—the sequence crystallizes the preferred reading of North Manual as aberrant, an “other” far from American norms. Studio head Dore Schary privately assured the producer: “We are very cognizant of the fact that our school should not appear typical. . . . We make the point that it is a special problem, and we dramatize another school which is more typical of the American educational system.”41 Within the scene, Dadier is assured that “for every school like yours, there are hundreds like this one,” emphasizing the co-ed suburban student body’s cultural desirability and ready reproducibility. Essentially a highlight reel set to the national anthem, the suburban sequence performs the editorial agency of the tape recorder at the level of form as well as content; it is the only montage in a film devoted to expressing realism through sustained shots unfolding in real time. Emphasizing quiet, orderliness, and control, the sequence culminates in a display of proper body discipline in service of national unity, a marked contrast to North Manual’s opening assembly, as the appropriately reproduced—and reproducible—citizen-subjects stand stock-still and ramrod-straight, singing the national anthem. However, because the montage is anything but “typical,” its star-spangled didacticism amplifies an ambivalent blend of paranoia and excitement about the othered sounds linked to North Manual’s delinquent bodies that threaten white middle-class control of the soundscape: nonstandard English, hipster slang, screaming, shouting, and rock and roll’s “jungle music.”

Fears of postwar juvenile delinquency frequently intertwined with debates over the tape recorder as a tool of legal authority, especially in the context of youth interrogation. In Blackboard Jungle, Dadier returns from the suburbs—national anthem still lingering in the soundtrack—to find two cops in the hallway demanding he reveal the students who assaulted him the week prior. His class files warily past, taking keen note of Dadier’s recorder case. “Spare
the tape recorder and spoil the child may become the slogan of the police," proclaimed a 1954 Times article, detailing how police recorded confessions from "neighborhood terrors" in Franklin Township for "playback to parents." The piece shows recorders utilized in the real-life regional setting of fictional North Manual to construct and archive lasting evidence of guilt; if any of the vandals reoffended, the police were to deny parental contact and force them to "tell their stories to the judge."42 Seemingly neutral, the tape recorder held out the democratizing possibility for all users to "tell their stories," but how, why, and to whom remained divisive matters. Existing social categories like "delinquent" and power differentials of race, class, and gender created uneven access to sonic reproduction that divided the recorders from the recorded.

Rather than offer reproductive agency, the tape recorder threatened the recorded at multiple sites—police station, workplace, and classroom—with the likelihood of being controlled or remade in another's image. Ampex, for example, developed tape loops of "industrial music for factories," designed to (re)produce diligent, efficient, and speedy workers on the line.43 Top-down tempos were to replace material formerly produced and selected by the workers themselves. In critiquing America's educational system, Blackboard Jungle—chock-full of rumbling machine shops and rite classroom drills—represents the factory floor as a best-case scenario for North Manual's students, and the tape recorder's presence there is as much vocational preparation as it is anything else.

In all probability, Dadier's fictional students would likely have encountered a tape recorder in previous classrooms, as public school budgets for hi-fi systems exploded post-World War II. School administrators viewed recorders as an efficient way to standardize instruction and reproduce model citizens through normed listening experiences. Half of New York City's schools had recorders by 1954; the 1955 budget sought one hundred to two hundred more. Playback helped discipline attitudes that educators sought to eliminate—"even 'behavior' problems are sometimes handled by means of carefully selected records" the Times noted—and model actions and beliefs that educators wanted students to emulate: history teachers played "Americans to Remember," while "in commercial classes, a recording illustrate[d] how a secretary should talk on the telephone."44 In these instances, the tape recorder functioned as a mechanical representation of the listening ear, not as its commodity expression (as in the RCA ads) but as an ideological imposition of a specific classed, raced, and gendered identity onto potentially deviant bodies to produce appropriately self-editing citizens.

Faith in tape's ability to reproduce Americans in a standardized image extended beyond altering behavior, attitudes, and listening habits to include assimilating the very sound of students' voices. In 1954, a year before Blackboard Jungle, the tape recorders provided English instruction for Puerto Rican migrants. A story for the New York Times represents the recorder's playback abilities as enabling uniform listening for new arrivals, thought necessary to reproduce and discipline proper pronunciation of English, allegedly the pathway to full-fledged citizenship.45 The accompanying image, captioned "Mechanical Teacher," depicts an orderly semicircle of inner-city Puerto Rican students listening intently to the recorder at the head of the classroom, with pencils raised and eyes riveted, another contrast to North Manual's noisy mob. In the photograph, the "mechanical teacher" has decentralized the authority and usurped the position of the students' human instructor, Dr. Morrero, who is demoted to a supervisory role and relegated to the edge of the frame. Although highly educated, as a Spanish-speaking woman of color she was neither representative of the look and sound of Americanness nor of the tape recorder's archetypal user.

Dadier, of course, is both, and the tape recorder enhances his authority. Unlike the Puerto Rican teacher, he retains his position at the classroom's head, symbolically sandwiched between the recorder and the American flag. Knitting recording and listening firmly to Americanness, Dadier explicitly interpellates his class into a unified "We, the People" through their ears, telling them "we all talk too much, but nobody listens." Dadier's statement connects listening to liberal notions of tolerance and democracy but also informs his class that what is essential to this new nation-formation is not self-expression—"their talk is always already "too much"—but their ability to develop a disciplined listening ear that would enable them to recognize, reject, and modify their noisy excesses. The tape recorder manifests Dadier's desire to classify, edit, and control his students, characterizing the machine as, partly, a sociotechnical embodiment of dominant cultural desires for perfectible and reproducible U.S. citizenship. After all, the tape recorder's many cultural guises—entertainment producer, domestic archive, masculine fetish, state witness, industrial metronome, and electronic teacher—held out the possibility of reproducing listeners with as much fidelity as it did sound. Dadier, however, had clearly never imagined Morales on the microphone.

"Tell Me All about Your Stinkin' Sister": Recording the Blackboard Jungle

Halfway through Blackboard Jungle, Dadier returns to North Manual inspired by his suburban visitation, tape recorder in hand, even more determined to con-

racialized sonic spectacle of a white recordist confronting a group of noisy ethnic youth recasts imagery of wire recording from a previous era—white folklorists like John Lomax and Alan Lomax capturing “authentic” sounds of black prisoners in rural Texas, for example—but with a different emphasis. While the white masculine listening ear still shapes the process, Dadier, unlike the Lomaxes, does not wish to curate “authentic” sonic versions of the other but to expose, circumscribe, and erase othered sounds and alternate listening practices. The students’ resistance also hints at how the Lomaxes’ subjects may have subverted the recording process in ways both obvious and covert. Dadier hints at these stakes when, irritated with the students’ babble, he screams for “Quiet!” and breaks his unitary “we” into the more familiar power dynamics of “you” and “I”: “Since you all want to talk so very badly, I guess I’m not going to have trouble getting you to talk into this machine.” His coercive statement reveals the flipside to the recordist’s more creative and enabling uses (suggested by the RCA ads) and makes the disciplinary—and silencing—capabilities of the recorder ripe for resistance.

Once Dadier achieves acceptable recording conditions he demands volunteers, and the students continue their subversion by nominating the classmate whom they implicitly perceive will sound most offensive to his listening ear: Morales. In dramatizing the students’ defiant selection—“We want Morales!” the class chants—the film critiques Dadier by exposing his inclusive call for volunteers as a ruse. He counters with a firm no and summons another student in Morales’ place. West and Miller then attempt to goad Dadier into admitting he does not consider the sound or the content of Morales’ speech tapeworthy: “What’s the matter with Morales?” West inquiries, feigning innocence. “Yeah, Morales he loves to talk. You ‘gainst Morales because he don’t talk good English?” Miller asks pointedly, caricaturing Morales’ accent and marking it as other not only to Dadier’s listening ear but also to the students’ collective class-based identity. While Morales emphatically shakes his head, he is compelled to take the microphone by codes of masculinity that demand he prove he is “no chicken.” Dadier, unwilling to admit he finds Morales unsuitable for his assignment, reluctantly assents.

As Morales wields the microphone, Blackboard Jungle works hard to contain his resistant potential by framing the sound of his speech as corruptive of American identity rather than performative of it. Morales’s suitability as a citizen is interrogated via his lack of ability to reproduce appropriately American sounds and listening practices for the recorder. As an accented “foreigner,” he is too aberrant for Dadier’s assignment. An early script has his lines in visible dialect, suggesting an intentional exaggeration of his accent: “I get up se’ev-
thirsty. I go wash. My stinkin’ sista, she’s inna bat’room, so I can’t get in.” The class disrupts the quiet recording conditions with laughter, finding humor in Morales’s accent and at his use of “stinkin’,” a euphemism to appease censors and a snide reference to stereotypes about Puerto Rican hygiene. The camera cuts to Dadier, who hurry Morales along: "That’s fine, boy, now keep talking.” Dadier’s encouragement provides Morales comfort; however, the more confident Morales becomes, the more his accent thickens and his speech fills with “stinkin’”s—a total of fourteen. The shot frames Morales’s body with the American flag and placards of “proper” grammar, albeit the kind usually seen at elementary schools. While the flag is iconic of American identity in the previous sequence, it provokes an ambivalent questioning here. Certainly the camerawork comments on what passes for English at North Manual, even as grammar school decorations decry the legacy of low expectations. The scene simultaneously debases the suburban montage, which featured Latin recitations to quiet onlookers, and presents a brash alternative to suburbia’s bland lockstep, exemplified in the hierarchical ground-up camera angle usually reserved for heroic figures. At the moment Morales attains a real on-screen presence, the camera captures his joy in self-expression—the very thing missing from the suburban scene—while the nationalistic backdrop silently indicates his foreign sound:

So I go down this stinkin’ street wit’ my stinkin’ books an’ I meet this stinkface who lives near me. He say “you gone to school Pete” I say “You stinkin’ right boy.” So we go together to the stinkin’ [el and we wait for the stinkin’ train and what do you know? The stinkin’ train is late. So I got to [get into a stinkin’ crowd]. An’ ‘at how come I’m stinkin’ late for school teach. How was I, okay?

Before Dadier reacts, a classmate answers, “You sure stunk up that record, boy!,” a triple entendre that riff’s on the speech’s “stinkin’” content, jokes about Morales’s smell, and pronounces his recording a failure.

Once finished, Dadier solidifies Morales’s position as classroom other with his paternal reaction. He whips the cord from the machine as West taunts, “Aren’t you gonna play it back?” Dadier stares him down, sarcastically admonishing: “Thanks for picking Morales, I am sure you are his friend.” Intended as protective, it is the closest Dadier comes to explaining his puzzling refusal to replay the tape. But rather than provide an alternate narrative—Morales as English-language learner or Morales as colonized citizen—Dadier’s remark authorizes the dominance of “unaccented” English as citizenship standard, confirming the aberrance of Morales’s sound. However, Blackboard Jungle does not unequivocally endorse Dadier, as Miller and West goad him into acknowledging the limits of his liberal tolerance. “Sure enough, Chief,” Miller deadpans, “too bad you can’t say the same.” When Dadier retorts, “Now just what does that mean?” West clarifies: “Morales is a spic, that’s what that means. And, I don’t know, maybe you don’t like spics.” West sneers, “Sit down, spic!” at Morales, who shouts, “At least I am no Irish nick!” To diffuse this heated exchange, Dadier gives an impromptu speech angrily cataloging racial and ethnic slurs in order to, “as he later tells the principal,” teach “a lesson in democracy, what should not be said.” Dadier characterizes democracy as a perfected public exchange dependent on editorial selection of appropriate words and sounds, practices reflected in and enabled by tape-recording technologies.

Although the script deems Dadier’s lesson a “defeat”—he has neither the recorder-ready voices of the RCA ads nor can he reproduce the silent attentiveness of the Puerto Rican students covered in the Times—West and Miller have clearly absorbed a message about “what should not be said.” West mocks Dadier’s empathetic liberal listening—with an exaggerated play of concern, he tells Morales: “Sure, come on, come on, tell me all about your stinkin’ sister”—while Miller’s character makes a more subtle critique of Dadier’s listening ear, repeatedly asking “You gonna play Morales’ record back, Chief?” Miller’s probing exposes the fact that Dadier, a liberal who preaches racial tolerance and colorblindness, cannot bring himself to an equivalent acceptance in the sonic realm. Despite Morales’s sincere fulfillment of the assignment—Dadier merely requested that he “talk about anything, how [he] got up this morning, how [he] took the bus to school”—Dadier refuses to replay the tape, even as an example of “incorrectness”; he has sensed potential power in Morales’s performance, especially in the students’ lively reaction to it. Attempting to regain control of the classroom soundscape and fearful that the tape’s playback may portend, validate, and even encourage uncontrollable proliferation of others who sound just like Morales, Dadier isolates his voice rather than risk its reproduction. Especially when contextualized within the rising popularity of “ethnic accents” and vernaculars in contemporary pop music, there is danger that Morales’s othered sound may prove enticing to the wrong crowd.

Denying Morales the ability to reproduce himself while aborting him from the official record, Dadier’s suppression racializes Morales’s class identity and raises doubts about his legitimacy as a U.S. citizen, constructing him as alien in ways North Manual’s black and ethnic white students are not. Marking his accent as an aural sign of unassimilable foreignness not only socializes the listening ear to discern a particular type of English as a de facto citizenship standard but also enables discrimination against Puerto Ricans despite birthright privilege. Priscilla Peña Ovalle’s concept of “in-betweenness” explains why
Blackboard Jungle marshals Morales's voice as such a prominent marker of racial and national difference. Embodying neither a normalized whiteness nor the threatening alterity of blackness—yet nonetheless imaged within the dominant black-white paradigm—Latinos were represented as fluctuating in between these two poles, an unstable difference mediating and preserving the status quo. The cultural politics of sound were especially acute for migrating Puerto Ricans, because their multiracial heritages did not readily align with reigning U.S. visual categories of race. Therefore, during the postwar migration, the “noise” of Spanish and the much-derided Puerto Rican accent were key to essentializing and naturalizing Puerto Rican otherness in the United States, justifying discrimination in jobs, housing, and education and blaming institutional inequities on Puerto Ricans themselves. The fact that Campos is actually Dominican American heightens the “in-betweenness” of his racial identity. It also points to the integral role of Blackboard Jungle in Hollywood's production of a generalized, exaggerated “Latin accent” during the 1940s and 1950s, exemplified by Desi Arnaz's and Carmen Miranda's personas. Blackboard Jungle's image of Morales's silenced record suggests a paradox: that stereotypical, racialized sounds were necessary to constructing and disciplining the listening ear, which then sought to suppress those very same sounds.

Race-ing around the Recorder, Rocking around the Clock

While visible codes of race are everywhere in Blackboard Jungle, the tape recorder scene elicits race's first overt acknowledgment. Deeply invested in ideologies of liberalism and colorblindness even as it critiques them, the film reveals listening as a readily available technology of racial and ethnic categorization. Brandished by Dadier as a technological manifestation of his listening ear, the recorder exerts pressure on existential classroom fractures by seeking a race- and class-specific sonic performance of Americanness that some students are unable to give and still others unwilling to. His listening ear seeks “a reality suitable for reproduction,” the institutionalized standards of a racialized sonic citizenship. However, his abortive attempt illustrates that tape recording's capacity for hi-fi reproduction was a manufactured facade dependent on dominant sonic protocols that demanded anything deemed unworthy of archiving to be erased, anything labeled as “noise” to be swiftly edited out, and any seemingly disparate audio elements to be seamlessly spliced. By refusing to replay Morales and redacting him from his classes' colorblind (racial) project, Dadier briefly gives his students—and Blackboard Jungle's audiences—an earful of the splices and erasures necessary to construct and reproduce the “reality” of postwar consensus culture.

Rather than unify the students—either as appropriately nationalized bodies or as a defiantly resistant proletariat—the ensuing fight over the tape's playback marks a break in solidarity where they acknowledge each other's divergent positions along the U.S. racial spectrum: “mick,” “spic,” “nigger.” While Dadier's assignment enables Miller and West to use the recorder against him, they draw attention to the sound of Morales’s voice in a way that marks his linguistic difference as a racialized contaminant. While Miller and West marshal cultural perceptions about Morales's accent as resistance against Dadier's listening ear, they reject Morales along these same lines. The students' acknowledgment of racial hierarchies prefigures Dadier's ambivalent “divide and conquer” victory at the film's close, yet still “allows [him] to be the voice of tolerance,” even as his refusal to replay the tape illustrates the narrow bounds of the term. Characteristic of cold war liberalism, this shifting relationship to race—oscillating between its firm denial and its continued exploitation for political ends—is facilitated by largely unacknowledged links between race, sound, and listening. By selecting Morales's voice as the most unassimilable, and least reproducible, Miller and West do not just expose Dadier's disavowed adherence to contemporary racial codes; they, too, construct and reproduce them.
Importantly, *Blackboard Jungle* highlights the students’ resistance and casts the recorder scene as a failure, suggesting that Dadier is not above critique, even within the film’s black-and-white logic. Although excising Morales shifts the reproductive burden solidly onto the voices—and ears—of the other students, it also exposes elements of Dadier’s identity as not quite suitable for reproduction. The tape recorder scene lingers in the film, activating a chain of events forcing the teacher to confront his internalized racism. After his tolerance speech lands him in hot water with Principal Warneke, he denies ever using racial slurs for noneducational purposes. However, when Dadier runs into Miller in the hallway after his dressing down, he angrily, and falsely, accuses Miller of complaining to Warneke, claiming “there was no racial issue until you made one.” Dadier escalates the conflict until he sneers, “You black—” stopping short when he notes Miller’s knowing look asking him to play that record back, teach, “Go ahead and say it,” Miller replies. While Dadier immediately apologizes, the damage is done. He is only able to reproduce young citizen-subjects after he repairs this unconscionable breach. However, Dadier’s individual redemption ironically insulates *Blackboard Jungle* from acknowledging institutionalized racism. The film shores up colorblind ideology by representing Miller as the student who ultimately reproduces Dadier’s listening ear, a move that disavows race even as it depends on the mutual acknowledgment of Morales’s sonic alterity. The penultimate shot audiovisually mirrors Dadier’s arrival at North Manual, this time showing Miller in Dadier’s position as a listener, stopping briefly under the El tracks as if he is seeing and hearing the city anew. “Rock Around the Clock” reprises, wiping out the city’s noise rather than devolving into it, suggesting resolution. The camera cuts to Dadier on the school’s steps, listening along with Miller and smiling proudly at his transformation: acknowledgment, at last, of Dadier’s reproductive mastery.

However, reports of frantic dancing in theaters across the country for the precious few bars of “Rock Around the Clock” highlights unresolved tension in the ending as well as cultural uncertainty about listening and tape recording as technologies able to reproduce consensus and contain the marginalized. The last-minute decision to include Bill Haley and the Comets’ song on *Blackboard Jungle*’s soundtrack catapulted the 1954 B-side onto music charts and helped break rock and roll, an African American musical form, into the mainstream. Ambivalence about tape recording emerges in the very foundations of the song; while it was recorded on Decca Records’ state-of-the-art Ampex tape machine, the session took all of two takes in ten minutes, leaving Decca’s engineers “shaken by the threat of lively meters peaking into the red” and shaking their heads over the Comets’ seeming lack of concern for “perfection” and their embracing of sounds that the men at the boards considered “noise.”

Rock’s rise created its own set of racialized erasures—some dubbed white band leader Haley the “Father of Rock and Roll,” for example—and its immediate effect on the national soundscape was palpable on- and offscreen. *Blackboard Jungle*’s gritty context transformed the tune from “an amusing novelty into a Greek chorus for adolescent rebellion.” Younger audiences snapped their fingers, clapped their hands, danced in the aisles, and occasionally slashed their seats to the Comets’ twelve-bar blues, using their bodies to mirror the jitterbugging, backtalking, marginalized boys of North Manual rather than the model of fine, upstanding American citizenship embodied by Dadier. Several theaters refused to run the credits to quell the youth’s maneuvers; hot on the heels of *Brown v. Board of Education*, fears of racially integrated movements—physical and otherwise—caused *Blackboard Jungle*’s banning in many segregated cities, including Memphis and Atlanta.

It is fitting that rhythmic resistance to the cold war’s racialized sonic regime owed debts to the tape recorder and *Blackboard Jungle*. Although racialized press coverage downplayed the rebelliousness as anachronistic primitivism, “an echo in staidier surroundings of tribal dances to the drum,” I read it as a reinstatement of the diversity, agency, and epistemology of sounding American bodies despite the silencing force of the listening ear. For just a few measures, crisp snare beats and jangling guitars aligned with stomping feet, shaking hips, and leaping limbs to transmit the knowledge that the much-heralded American consensus remained the disciplining ideal of a few rather than the foregone fate of the many. While stomping down aisles in Massachusetts or setting off fire alarms in New Jersey may not have disturbed the historical power imbalances that necessitated rebellion, they opened the listening ear just that much wider to “American” sounds silenced for too long. In our contemporary moment, when links between sound and U.S. citizenship are being codified into law—Arizona’s SB 1070, which bars teachers with accents from teaching English in public schools and allows for linguistic profiling—we would do well to remember these extradiegetic acts of resistance alongside the most important lesson of Dadier’s classroom: that racial liberalism was not mutually exclusive with intensified segregation and discrimination. The status quo could espouse colorblindness in the service of national unity because their listening ears were attuned to sonic markers of difference.
Race, Cold War Liberalism, and the Tape Recorder | 805


22. Ibid., 122.

23. "To have and to hear forever," Harper's, November 1954, 111.

24. "You cherish his picture . . . why not his voice?" Harper's, October 1954, 112.

25. Lisa Gitelman, Always Already New: Media, History, and the Data of Culture (Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 2006). The protocols include a list of normative rules and default conditions, which align and gather like a nebulous array around a technological nucleus (7). Another protocol, related to Leo Brady (e-mail to author, July 3, 2010), involved borrowing recorders to "send messages to faraway friends and relatives," a practice emphasizing the recorder's ability to reconnect family lines (and thus reproduce national stability) ruptured by massive geographic displacements: the Depression, World War II, urban renewal, and suburbanization.


27. Ibid., 161; and Eric Berry, "Hi Fidelity Sound as Spectacle and Sublime," Sound in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction, ed. David Saisman and Susan Stass (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2010), 122–33.


33. McCoy, "Manager, Buddy, Delinquent," 27.


35. Leo Brady, The World is a Frame: What We See in Films (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1976), 225. Ironically, Ford himself was a naturalized American citizen from Québec City, Canada. For a defense of representation of American masculinity tied to the association of whiteness and "accentless" English with Americanness and the continued power of the U.S. assimilation narrative.


40. McCoy, "Manager, Buddy, Delinquent," 26. McCoy also notes audiovisual constructions of otherness: "Codes that are both visual (the camera's emphasis on their slick, exposed skin) and auditory (a soundtrack filled with their noise) connote the children's Otherness and, by extension, their future delinquency" (26).
Sounds of Surveillance: U.S. Spanish-Language Radio Patrols La Migra

Dolores Inés Casillas

Señor, quiero darle las gracias por esa pregunta porque me da la oportunidad de decirle a usted como recibo algo de la inmigración más general sino que quiero escuchar la misma cosa que le voy a decir a usted. Si usted recibe algo de la inmigración tiene un sello que fue enviado de la estación en Juárez, no necesita cruzar la frontera para completar el proceso.

Sir, I'd like to thank you for asking that question, because this gives me the opportunity to tell fellow listeners out there the same advice that I'm about to share with you. If you receive anything in the mail from the INS postmarked from their Juárez station, you do not need to cross the border to complete the legal documentation process there.

—Guest attorney answering caller's immigration question (2004)

¡La migra está aquí en el Eastern y Whittier Boulevard, no se acercan si no tienen papeles!

La migra is here at the corner of Eastern and Whittier Boulevard, stay away if you don't have legal papers!

—Caller's on-air warning (2005)

Utterances of immigration and the immigrant experience are repeatedly heard on Spanish-language radio, often voiced live with a tenor of urgency and well outside the lyrical boundaries of song. With a rich history of catering to immigrant-based listeners, Spanish-language radio has capitalized—quite lucratively—on the conversation around immigration. Both commercial and community-based radio stations routinely feature a live call-in segment with a guest expert, be it a doctor, social worker, nutritionist, or the occasional politician. Yet it is clearly the billing of a guest immigration attorney that consistently attracts a high volume of caller participation. As one radio host shared with me, "The lines light up like a Christmas tree well before we say 'OK, we welcome your calls.'" Depending on the particulars of the radio show, listeners receive an hour or two of current and free legal updates as they sympathetically listen to the legal plights of others. Together, listeners make sense of revisions to already intricate legal forms, complain about periodic