HIP HOP MATTERS

THE SOCIOPOLITICAL MESSAGE OF HIP HOP MUSIC IN THE #BLACKLIVESMATTER ERA

Lotte Scharn
4571894
Supervisor: Prof. Dr. Frank Mehring
BA American Studies
2018-2019
Teacher who will receive this document: F. Mehring


Name of course: BA thesis

Date of submission: June 15, 2018

The work submitted here is the sole responsibility of the undersigned, who has neither committed plagiarism nor colluded in its production.

Signed,

Name of student: Lotte Scharn

Student number: s4571894
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS
ABSTRACT

This research project aims to discover the sociopolitical message of hip hop music from 2013 to today: hip hop of the ‘#BlackLivesMatter Era’. The thesis argues that analyzing hip hop songs helps to reveal key issues in America’s sociopolitical environment. The aspects explored are (the history of) hip hop music as a protest genre, themes in hip hop music from the 1980s, and the #BlackLivesMatter Movement. Through finally analyzing case studies of Kendrick Lamar and J. Cole and connecting these analyses to #BlackLivesMatter rhetoric, this thesis concludes that the sociopolitical message of hip hop music in the #BlackLivesMatter Era is that black lives matter and that changing America’s racist society is necessary.

Keywords: hip hop music, protest music, racism, #BlackLivesMatter Movement, N.W.A., Public Enemy, Kendrick Lamar, J. Cole.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Title Page</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cover Sheet</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acknowledgements</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Abstract</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research Question, Sub-questions, and Hypothesis</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Defining the Research Question</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Literature</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Methodology</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter 1: The Intersection Between Hip Hop and Protest</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.1 Music and Protest</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.2 Hip Hop and Protest</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.3 N.W.A. and Public Enemy</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter 2: The #BlackLivesMatter Movement</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.1 Origin and Strategy</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.2 Rhetoric</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.3 Political Results</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter 3: Themes in Hip Hop from the #BlackLivesMatter Era</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.1 Kendrick Lamar</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.2 J. Cole</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter 4: The Relation Between BLM and Contemporary Hip Hop</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.1 Similarities</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.2 Differences</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conclusion</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bibliography</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendix</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendix 1: N.W.A. – Straight Outta Compton (1988)</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendix 2: Public Enemy – It Takes A Nation Of Millions To Hold Us Back (1988)</td>
<td>78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendix 3: Kendrick Lamar – To Pimp a Butterfly (2015)</td>
<td>103</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Analysis</td>
<td>150</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Images</td>
<td>152</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
INTRODUCTION

“Being part of hip hop is being an activist.”

- Killer Mike
  Rapper

Before 2017, I had neither listened to hip hop music, nor had I ever really shown any interest in its history. A last-minute decision to buy $14 tickets to a Jay-Z concert during my study abroad in New Orleans, USA changed my prejudiced attitude. The concert was sold out and the majority of the attendees were African Americans. It felt quite uneasy to be at the venue: the other attendees made it obvious that I, a Caucasian female, was not really wanted there. Why? Because it was not my story that was being told through Jay-Z’s music, but that of the thousands of African Americans that had gathered there to listen to music made by and for them. Listening to the painful, yet empowering, lyrics and speeches uttered, and feeling the hopeful atmosphere right there at that moment gave me goose bumps. I found out hip hop was not just music with explicit lyrics: the artists were truly trying to proclaim a sociopolitical message. This racially tinted message piqued my interest: I was not aware that the racial conversation was a topic of such broad and current discussion in the United States, especially since racial differences do not seem to be as big a problem in my own country, the Netherlands. The message proclaimed in hip hop music thus seemed like a message worth unpacking. Now, less than a year later, this thesis is the result of the spontaneous decision to buy those $14 tickets.

RESEARCH QUESTION, SUB-QUESTIONS, AND HYPOTHESIS

Little to no research has been conducted on the political message hip hop has proclaimed over the last five years. The main purpose of the present research is therefore to discover the sociopolitical message of hip hop music from 2013 to today: hip hop of the ‘#BlackLivesMatter Era’. Studying contemporary hip hop music is interesting and important because the racial conversation is not only a topic of the past: it is also a topic of broad and current interest in the United States today. Police violence, racial profiling, and the #BlackLivesMatter Movement are all topics that are dealt with in the news on a daily basis. This thesis argues that analyzing recent hip hop songs will help reveal key issues in America’s sociopolitical environment.
The main question guiding this research is: What is the sociopolitical message of hip hop music in the #BlackLivesMatter Era? In order to be able to answer this question, this thesis focuses on four main topics: sociopolitical messages in hip hop music in the past (1980s), the #BlackLivesMatter Movement, the sociopolitical message of hip hop music of the #BlackLivesMatter Era (2013-2018), and the relation between the #BlackLivesMatter Movement and contemporary hip hop. These topics are researched using sub-questions which provide the layout for the chapters in this thesis.

The first topic studies hip hop music of the 1980s, because this was the decennium in which hip hop music first became popular and shocked America with its politicized lyrics (Starr and Waterman, 429). This chapter contextualizes contemporary hip hop music. The sub-questions used to study this topic are:

1.1 In which way do music and protest relate to each other?
1.2 What is the origin of hip hop music as a protest genre?
1.3 What were major sociopolitical themes in 1980s hip hop music and what was the message 1980s hip hop music aimed to purvey?

The second chapter explores the #BlackLivesMatter Movement, as the movement seems to share an agenda with hip hop music from the last five years. The chapter consists of the following sub-questions:

2.1 What is the origin of the #BlackLivesMatter Movement and which strategy does the #BlackLivesMatter Movement use to reach its goals?
2.2 What are major themes in #BlackLivesMatter’s rhetoric?
2.3 Which successes has the #BlackLivesMatter Movement reached thus far?

The third chapter discusses sociopolitical themes in hip hop music from the #BlackLivesMatter Era. It also relates these themes to the #BlackLivesMatter Movement. This chapter therefore seeks to answer the following sub-questions:

3.1 What are major sociopolitical themes in Kendrick Lamar's music?
3.2 What are major sociopolitical themes in J. Cole’s music?

The last topic explores the relationship between contemporary hip hop music and the #BlackLivesMatter Movement. The sub-questions answered in this chapter are:

4.1 What are the similarities between contemporary hip hop music and BLM?
4.2 What are the differences between contemporary hip hop music and BLM?

With regards to the research question, I expect to find that, much like in the 1980s, contemporary hip hop music deals with facts about and issues with the sociopolitical environment in the United States. The issues dealt with in hip hop music from the last five
years, however, will probably cover different subjects than hip hop did in the 1980s. Issues discussed in newer hip hop are likely about police violence, police brutality/killings, racism, white privilege, and racial profiling, as these are topics that are of broad and current discussion in the United States at the moment. I also expect to find a significant similarity between themes in hip hop from the #BlackLivesMatter Era and the rhetoric of the #BlackLivesMatter Movement, because the topics described previously are all at the core of the #BlackLivesMatter Movement (V. White, 4-5). Hip hop is a ‘black genre’ that comments on mistreatment of African Americans (Rose, 9), which the #BlackLivesMatter Movement does as well. In this way, the movement and the music might share an agenda.

DEFINING THE RESEARCH QUESTION

From the 1970s onward, hip hop developed into a musical genre, a culture, and a complete lifestyle consisting of multiple creative forms of expression such as breakdancing and graffiti. The main focus of this research, however, is restricted to hip hop music in terms of lyrics, performances, and visuals in hip hop video clips. The term ‘hip hop’ in this research from now on excludes (cultural) aspects of hip hop such as breakdancing, clothing, rapping, beat boxing, and graffiti.

Following the prominent work of Tricia Rose, Black Noise, the term is also defined and used as a purely African American genre, as she argues hip hop is tied to location, thereby suggesting hip hop is representative of the African American experience in African American neighborhoods (Rose, 9). This suggestion is supported by Jon Michael Spencer, who proposes that African American music cannot be read without consideration of African American history (Spencer, 8).

The term ‘sociopolitical’ pertains to subjects that involve both social and political factors. An example of such a factor is a political movement, which serves social interests in a political environment and in order to reach a political goal. The #BlackLivesMatter Movement can be seen as such a movement.

Lastly, the ‘#BlackLivesMatter Era’ reaches approximately from 2013 to today: the movement was founded in 2013 and still organizes events in 2018.
Many scholars in the field have discussed and proven the tremendous impact hip hop has had on the advancement of African Americans. The following section will therefore review major publications on the subject of hip hop music.

One of the most prominent works in the field is that of Professor Tricia Rose. In *Black Noise*, Rose examines various facets of rap music. Her book treats subjects reaching from hip hop’s origins, its connection to politics, and the cultural aspect of hip hop to breakdancing, hip hop and gender, and messages in rap music. Especially the latter is of importance to my research. With regards to messages in hip hop, Rose claims that hip hop’s “capacity as a form of testimony, as an articulation of a young black urban critical voice of social protest has profound potential as a basis for a language of liberation” (Rose, 144). She also maintains that the hip hop artist’s voice is deeply political in content and spirit, but that this content is partially hidden. She believes that this hidden message should be revealed, because following the “hip hop hype” would not make a difference otherwise (Rose, 145).

Another important work in the field is *Hip Hop Culture* by Emmett George Price III, a speaker, educator, and writer dealing with hip hop in his works. His book provides a good overview of the history of hip hop. In *Hip Hop Culture*, Price covers the rise and spread of hip hop culture, elements of hip hop culture, issues in hip hop culture, globalization of hip hop music, and biographies of hip hop artists. Price demonstrates a very positive image of hip hop culture. He maintains hip hop is a unifying force for those who have experience with black culture and those who have experience with poverty (Price, 19). He also asserts that hip hop is about having a good time, while subtly interjecting messages through music (Price, 41). Price concludes his chapter on the elements of hip hop by stating that “hip hop participants take pride in understanding the history of the movement and the lineage of these forms of expression” (Price, 42).

*The New H.N.I.C.: The Death of Civil Rights and the Reign of Hip Hop* by Dr. Todd Boyd is another interesting book on the topic of hip hop. Dr. Boyd is an accomplished scholar in the field of race and popular culture. *The New H.N.I.C.* is a provocative book written in slang language which argues that the Civil Rights Movement is over and that hip hop culture has taken over the Civil Right Movement’s task (Boyd, 6).

Kelsey Basham, a Justice Studies scholar of East Kentucky University, has published an article called *Perspectives on the Evolution of Hip-Hop Music through Themes of Race, Crime, and Violence*. In this article, Basham examines the role of race, crime, and violence in hip hop music and the way it reflects broader social issues in society. She utilizes the top 100
hip hop songs from the 1970s to today as case studies to research reflections of social issues in hip hop music. Basham concludes that “hip-hop is one of the most influential social mechanisms in our nation’s history” (Basham, 53) and that it “has promising impacts” (Basham, 53).

Other interesting publications include articles and books written by Bakari Kitwana, Katina Stapleton, and Hashim Shomari. Kitwana, activist and political journalist, writes in his article on hip hop’s political power that hip hop gave young African Americans national and international visibility, which raised awareness for subjects such as discrimination and the circumstances in which people lived in ghettos (Kitwana, 116). Katina Stapleton of Duke University shares a similar view, claiming that uses of hip-hop in political action help increase political awareness and organize collaborative action through the use of lyrical protest (Stapleton, 221). According to Shomari, writer of a short study named From the Underground: Hip Hop Culture as an Agent of Social Change, hip hop is therefore not only a genre of music, but also an agent of social change (Shomari).

METHODOLOGY

In chapter one, the intersection between hip hop music and protest is studied in a historical context. The aim of this chapter is to prove that hip hop was originally a form of social criticism on the racist attitudes against and the subordinate position of African Americans in society. This chapter consists of information about the relationship between music and protest in general and a short history of the intersection between hip hop music and protest. The method used for this part of the chapter is literature research and review. A close reading of two case studies of influential hip hop artists from the 1980s, N.W.A. and Public Enemy, are provided at the end of the chapter to contextualize the theory.

The second chapter provides a short overview of the history of the #BlackLivesMatter Movement, its agenda, major recurring themes in its discourse, and its political achievements. It is important to have a thorough understanding of the movement and the themes that are associated with it before proceeding to interpret contemporary hip hop music in light of the movement. This chapter is based on extensive literature research and literature review.

Chapter 3 consists of a close reading of two case studies of contemporary hip hop artists who have not been afraid of publicly commenting on America’s racist social environment: Kendrick Lamar and J. Cole. These case studies reveal messages, themes, and opinions about today’s social environment in the United States of America.
To ultimately be able to answer the research question, the last chapter of this thesis looks at similarities and differences between BLM and contemporary hip hop music in the approach to sociopolitical issues by means of comparing and contrasting the observations made in chapters 2 and 3.

The conclusion finally discusses the findings of this research, answers the research question, and suggests ideas for further research.
CHAPTER 1: THE INTERSECTION BETWEEN HIP HOP AND PROTEST

“Hip hop is vital to any movement. It is used to convey your message, raise awareness, and most importantly, get people activated and moving.”

- Yirim Seck

Hip Hop Emcee

1.1 MUSIC AND PROTEST

Throughout history, music has proven to be a productive form of protest. Social organizations such as Nueva Canción in Latin America, the Anti-Apartheid Movement in South Africa, and the Civil Rights Movement in the United States have all made clever usage of music for their protests. The Nueva Canción Movement used socially charged music in the Spanish language to counter American and European commercial music (Fairley, 12), for example. The Anti-Apartheid Movement utilized music as a “communal act of expression” which “both fueled and united the movement” (Vershbow), and the Civil Rights Movement chanted songs in order to “serve the committed”, “educate the uneducated”, recruit members, and to mobilize people (Rosenthal, 12-15). What is the relationship between music and protest? And what is protest music? In this chapter, the intersections between music and protest, and hip hop and protest are studied.

Following Sumangala Damodaran’s Protest and Music, music has always represented a mode of expression. It is therefore a medium for expressing discontent as well (Damodaran, 1). Periods of unrest give rise to songs of discontent, songs that garner support among people, songs that express a grievance, and songs that describe certain conditions in society (Damodaran, 2). In this way, music is used as a form of politics that is made to achieve a certain goal. According to Denisoff, one of the earliest scholars who attempted to define protest music, such goals include “highlighting social ills, recommending solutions to problems, serving as a form of political propaganda, recruiting members for a cause, or contributing toward feelings of solidarity” (Denisoff quoted in Damodaran, 6).

Damodaran suggests there are three main areas to protest music: lyrics, identity, and musical grammar. The first, and perhaps most important, area is the lyrics of a song. Because of the importance of the lyrics in protest music, there is an “excessive focus” on song text in protest music (Barker quoted in Damodaran, 6). In this way, protest music can be read as a text
Such “texts” can be either magnetic or rhetorical. The former pertains to protest songs that have simple melodies and lyrics, meaning that protest music of this kind is able to hold the attention at gatherings, easily catches attention, can be part of campaigns, and can tell stories of injustice. The latter are protest songs that are less direct and aim to draw in the listener on an emotional level (Damodaran, 6).

The second area, identity, is also of high importance to understanding protest music. The reason for this is that music in general is a meaningful method of creating identity and in the case of protest music even more so, because it reflects the ideology of a certain group. The music reflects the struggles of people who have actually experienced those things they are protesting against, thereby granting it authority (Damodaran, 10; Schwarz quoted in Damodaran, 11).

The last area to protest music according to Damodaran is musical grammar. This aspect has much more to do with the form of the actual music, rather than the lyrics. The “grammar” has to do with which sounds and instruments are being used, the tones in the music, the use of voice, and the incorporation of foreign elements (Damodaran, 13). The aim of musical grammar is to reflect emotions and situations using the elements described above. An example of a song in which musical grammar plays a large role is Jimi Hendrix’s live performance of the Star Spangled Banner at Woodstock in 1969. This version of the American national anthem was distorted in a very aggressive manner to make a statement about the Vietnam War (Clague, 435-36). Musical grammar thus is a highly interpretative aspect of protest music.

In sum, protest music is music that expresses discontent with certain aspects of society through the use of lyrics, identity formation, and musical grammar. This is the result of the fact that music has always been an expressive medium. Next, it is important to discover the connection between hip hop and protest.

### 1.2 HIP HOP AND PROTEST

At the end of the 1970s, The Bronx burned: fires raged through the New York City borough, destroying countless houses, schools, and other buildings (Avirgan). Figuratively, another burning rage surged the ghetto, because postwar The Bronx was not what it used to be. Returning soldiers abandoned the borough for neighborhoods such as Queens and Long Island where they could live in special GI houses. This so-called “white flight” resulted in a declining economy in The Bronx (Price, 5-6). The abandoned neighborhood appealed to minorities such as African Americans, Dominicans, and Puerto Ricans. Sadly, discrimination and poverty in The Bronx made for a highly unstable existence. The minorities that had moved into the area
were fatigued by the perpetual mistreatment they had to suffer: single parents were living on welfare, there was high unemployment, there were gang wars, the area was unsafe due to killings and muggings, and some of them were even jailed or killed by the police (“The Foundation”, 00:05:22-00:05:57). The borough was even dubbed “America’s worst slum” (Price, 4). Yet, the people of the predominantly black neighborhood found a creative outlet as a means of expressing their feelings and addressing injustice: hip hop music.

At social gatherings called ‘block parties’, people of various ethnicities assembled to share their cultures (i.e. foods, drinks, music, art, etc.) and to express the harsh conditions in which they lived. This exchange of culture resulted in a concoction of miscellaneous cultural aspects, such as art and music. A mixture of musical styles influenced by African and Caribbean culture, as well as toasts DJs (DJ Kool Herc in particular) gave over instrumental tracks, laid the foundation for the hip hop genre (Price, 11). Its core aspects were rapping, beat matching, and emceeing (Alridge, 190). Emcees rapped politically charged statements over captivating rhythms produced on turntables. Their raps “provided an unvarnished view of the dystopia that infect[ed] many urban communities” (Starr and Waterman, 443). The political aspect of hip hop music rapidly generated widespread popularity of the genre. Its listeners soon discovered that hip hop could be used as “a basis for pragmatic political action” (Stapleton, 230). In this way, it became an informational tool and means of resistance (Stapleton, 231). Music was however not the only aspect of hip hop: it became an entire culture. Elements that were essential to hip hop culture were DJs, graffiti, breakdancing b-boys and b-girls, emcees, baggy fashion, and urban slang (Price, 21-38).

Hip hop groups like N.W.A. and Public Enemy understood the power of hip hop thoroughly and tackled miscellaneous sociopolitical issues in their music. In doing so, their goal was to protest and raise public awareness on subjects such as police violence and ghetto culture. They succeeded: songs like *Fuck Tha Police* arguably became the most controversial songs of their time. In order to understand how arduous sociopolitical subjects were interlaced with hip hop music, the next part of this chapter will outline recurring themes in 1980s hip hop discourse. This is the era in which the genre first flourished (Starr and Waterman, 429). The themes have been derived from close readings of the lyrics of N.W.A.’s *Straight Outta Compton* (1988) and Public Enemy’s *It Takes a Nation of Millions to Hold Us Back* (1988). These albums are representative of hip hop at its time and therefore representative of the general discourse in hip hop in the 1980s. The reason for analyzing only the lyrics of these albums follows from Damodaran’s argument that the lyrics of protest music are the most important aspect of the genre (Damodaran, 4).
1.3 N.W.A. AND PUBLIC ENEMY

Before analyzing N.W.A.’s and Public Enemy’s albums, the two influential hip hop groups deserve a proper introduction. The former (i.e. N.W.A. or ‘Niggaz Wit Attitudes’) was an American hip hop group that is considered one of the greatest hip hop groups in history (M. White, 64). Most of its members, including Ice Cube and Dr. Dre, are still very popular today. In 2015, a biopic called Straight Outta Compton was made about N.W.A.’s story, which proves the group’s relevance in history and today. The group made political hip hop music (or ‘gangsta rap’) and was mostly known for its profound hatred of the police and police violence against minorities in particular (Howell, 83). Unsurprisingly, one of their best-known songs is called Fuck Tha Police (1988). The case study for N.W.A. is a lyrical analysis of the group’s first and most controversial album Straight Outta Compton (1988). As follows from Damodaran’s arguments in chapter 2, the lyrics should be analyzed as this is one of the most important features of protest music. The reason for this is because lyrics can be read as a text (Barker quoted in Damodaran, 6). The lyrics are analyzed in listening charts, which list the lyrics on the left side and interpretations of the lyrics on the right side. Such an analysis demonstrates social criticism of the sociopolitical environment (e.g. racism against African Americans) at the time, as well as sociopolitical themes the artists were concerned with.

Public Enemy was a popular hip hop group from New York that also made politically charged hip hop music. They fashioned themselves after black power groups such as the Black Panther Party from the Civil Rights Era (Pelton). The clever usage of such symbols hints at the group’s concerns with the subordinate position of African Americans in society. In 2004, the group was ranked best hip hop group by Rolling Stone Magazine (quoted in Pelton). Their second album It Takes a Nation of Millions to Hold Us Back (1988) was a breakthrough for hip hop (Starr and Waterman, 433) and was certified platinum by the Recording Industry Association of America a little over a year after it was published (“Public Enemy”). For this reason, the case study for Public Enemy is a lyrical analysis of It Takes a Nation of Millions to Hold Us Back. The analysis of this case study exhibits the political aspect of hip hop in its early years, as well as some major themes discussed to highlight sociopolitical inequities.

N.W.A. and Public Enemy’s albums have revealed five main sociopolitical themes: racism, ghettos, the authorities, the media, and black leaders/icons. These themes are discussed in detail in the following section in order to answer the sub-question corresponding to this subchapter: ‘what were major sociopolitical themes in 1980s hip hop music and what was the message 1980s hip hop music aimed to purvey?’ Please note that the full analyses of the albums can be found in the listening charts at the back of this thesis in appendixes 1 and 2.
The most frequent, and perhaps most important, recurring theme in the albums is the subject of racism. It appears to be the causative factor of all other themes, as it lays the groundwork for certain societal norms and views which influence black opportunities in society in return. The lyrics first of all demonstrate racism is a product of the idea that black is the enemy. Black does not conform to society’s white chauvinistic norms and is therefore deemed the enemy, hence presumably also Public Enemy’s stage name. Following Public Enemy’s argument in *Night of the Living Baseheads*, racism is also the product of a historical precedent in the United States: slavery (Public Enemy, appendix 2.11). As a result, the institution of slavery is hinted at throughout the lyrics repeatedly. Prisons, in which African Americans unjustly serve time, are compared to slavery, for example. Other instances in which slavery is compared to contemporary times include escaping prisons to the north (hinting at the free North in American history), and being silenced and robbed of one’s culture (hinting at the Middle Passage).

Racism further leads to racial prejudice, which is apparent in multiple ways according to the artists. In *Fuck Tha Police*, for instance, N.W.A. states that the police is “searchin’ my car, lookin’ for the product. Thinkin’ every nigga is sellin' narcotics” (N.W.A., appendix 1.2). Ice Cube’s claim here is that the police is looking through his car in search of drugs, because it is widely assumed that every black person sells this product. Naturally, this is untrue. Another such prejudice is that it is believed that hip hop is solely explicit music, while the artists believe it to be of high educational value and a way of communicating emotions and concerns. Social norms lead to racism, and racism ultimately leads to social misunderstandings.

Another major theme in the artists’ music is the ghetto: a part of a city in which minorities live and in which crime and poverty rates are often high. Compton is indisputably the most famous and obvious example of a ghetto mentioned on the albums. The ghetto is vividly described in the majority of the songs, allowing the listener to envision the scene as if they were there. This aspect increases the credibility of the songs. Problems that plague the ghetto (as analyzed from the albums) are crime, poverty, prostitution, drug and alcohol problems, (black-on-black) violence, and unhealthy living conditions. In *Night of the Living Baseheads*, for example, Public Enemy comments on the crack cocaine epidemic that swept through American ghettos during the 1980s (Starr and Waterman, 434). The fact that such conditions are mentioned is on the one hand recognizable for those who experience them and on the other hand shocking for those who do not. Especially the latter empowers the message the artists are aiming to convey.
It is also interesting to note that the artists frequently state that they are either born in a ghetto or live in a ghetto, such as in the line “straight outta Compton” (N.W.A., appendix 1.1). Repeatedly stating this fact serves two purposes. Firstly, it ensures listeners that they are listening to truthful facts and “bestow[s] upon them [i.e. the listener; L.S.] the credibility that goes with authenticity” (M. White, 87). Secondly, it grants the artists authority, because they are speaking from experience. This experience is also called “street knowledge” and comes with a display of wisdom of events associated with street life (Price, 40). In this sense, one could argue the music becomes an autobiography to a certain degree. Besides the fact that the ghetto has downsides, the artists do seem to take pride in being from a ghetto. Lyrics such as “tell ‘em where you from” (N.W.A., appendix 1.1) are almost uttered with honor because it has shaped the artists to who they are today and also because it demonstrates that one can become successful even when they come from the bottom of society.

The authorities, and in particular the police, also make up a big part of the argument the artists are making. The hypocrisy of government agencies and federal organizations are centralized in this argument. In *Fuck Tha Police*, the most obvious and outspoken song against the police, the artists point at the fact that the police make false allegations, engage in violence against minorities, and racially profile.

*Fuck the police! Comin' straight from the underground*

*A young nigga got it bad ‘cause I'm brown*

*And not the other color, so police think*

*They have the authority to kill a minority*

*Fuck that shit, ‘cause I ain't the one*

*For a punk motherfucker with a badge and a gun*

*To be beating on, and thrown in jail* (N.W.A, appendix 1.2)

In this passage, it is explained that the African American in question is being executed by the police because of his skin color, and that another is being incarcerated for discriminatory reasons. Public Enemy comments on the police’s racial prejudices in their song *Bring the Noise*. In this song, they rap: “Five-O said, "Freeze!" and I got numb. Can I tell ’em that I really never had a gun?” (Public Enemy, appendix 2.2). The scene sketched in these lyrics describes how the black artist was apprehended by the police while he was not even in possession of a weapon. Yet, the assumption (and/or prejudice) that a black man owns a gun seems to be enough for the
police to arrest the artist. Incidents as the ones described by N.W.A. and Public Enemy occurred frequently. The artists’ music is consequently utilized to express the emotions that accompanied the events.

Other governmental institutions that are criticized in the albums include the presidency, the FBI, and the CIA. One of the claims Public Enemy makes is that these institutions are spying on the people and that they are actively suppressing any form of resistance. In Louder Than a Bomb, the artists claim that the president is wiretapping their telephones, for example. The artists also assert that the government is behind the assassinations of Martin Luther King Jr. and Malcolm X: “your CIA, you see I ain’t kiddin’. Both King and X they got rid of both. A story untold, true but unknown” (Public Enemy, appendix 2.7). The preceding lyrics demonstrate a hostile relationship between the government and the black public, and there appears to be an intense distrust of the government and the justice system among African Americans.

Another subject discussed in the lyrics frequently are the media. Especially Public Enemy disapproves of the media and dedicates multiple songs to the subject. In She Watch Channel Zero!?, the group claims that one of their girlfriends’ brains has “been trained by a 24 inch remote” and that her brains are “being washed by an actor” (Public Enemy, appendix 2.10). Their main point is that television indoctrinates viewers with certain norms and values, and that this keeps the public nescient. They suggest that people should read more books in order to educate themselves about their cultures, norms, and values. Their second point of criticism regarding the media is directed at radio stations that never play the group’s music. One of the reasons for this is the fact that hip hop music was not generally accepted among white listeners due to its explicit nature. Another reason highlighted by Public Enemy is the fact that many white listeners were afraid of hearing the truth and therefore unwilling to listen to hip hop music. Their primary disparagement, however, is aimed at black radio stations, which seemed to be afraid of playing black music as well. In Bring the Noise, the group raps: “radio stations I question their blackness. They call themselves black, but we'll see if they'll play this” (Public Enemy, appendix 2.2). This section of the song hints at the fact that local black radio stations, which originally served the specific needs of their listeners, stopped playing black music in fear of lower ratings. Radio stations were becoming increasingly commercialized by corporations that purchased local stations and such stations now had to appeal to a wider (and whiter) public, meaning hip hop faded from the picture (Blanchard). In response to the critical media, the artists accentuated the educational value of their music utilizing words such as “lessons”, “learning”, and “truth” in their lyrics regularly. One such instance is “listen for lessons I'm saying inside
music that the critics are blasting me for” (Public Enemy, appendix 2.2), which exhibits the friction between the educational value and criticism of hip hop perfectly.

As mentioned earlier, important black resistance leaders such as Martin Luther King Jr. and Malcolm X are mentioned numerous times in the analyzed lyrics as well. Such names are voiced to reinforce Black Nationalism, unite African Americans, and symbolize the black struggle (Dahliwal). Public Enemy even dedicates one entire song to express the fact that God has not only brought forth white historical heroes, but also black leaders such as Nelson and Winnie Mandela, Rosa Parks, and Marcus Garvey. These important black people were all committed to furthering the black cause and either succeeded or had a significant impact on society and/or history. Other symbols utilized to promote Black Nationalism are the colors of the African Liberation Flag, the Black Panther Party, and the Underground Railroad.

The five themes described above each articulate a political message and the sociopolitical undertones utilized are all attempts to encourage black equality, pride, unity, and support. The final argument in 1980s hip hop music is hence quite straightforward: black lives matter. Music has historically speaking always been a mode of expression and hence also for expressing discontent. Discontent among African Americans in ghettos sparked the development of hip hop music. In hip hop, rappers tackled miscellaneous sociopolitical issues. Influential hip hop artists from the 1980s discussed issues such as racism, police brutality, and life in the ghetto. Regrettably, such societal issues are still a problem today and the #BlackLivesMatter Movement is trying to fight these issues. The next chapter sets out to discuss this movement, its origins, and its goals.
CHAPTER 2: THE #BLACKLIVESMATTER MOVEMENT

“*The fact that humanity has to clarify that any lives matter, should be concern enough.*”

- Unknown (via Quozio)

2.1 ORIGIN AND STRATEGY

The #BlackLivesMatter Movement (hereafter: BLM) is of high importance to this thesis, as I hypothesized that there are significant similarities between BLM’s rhetoric and themes in hip hop music from the #BlackLivesMatter Era. The reason for this is that hip hop music has been defined as a purely African American genre (Rose, 9) and that BLM protests the second-class status of and racism against African Americans. If hip hop from the #BlackLivesMatter Era is anything like hip hop from the 1980s, it is probable that contemporary hip hop criticizes American society for mistreating African Americans as well. In this regard, contemporary hip hop and BLM might share an agenda. Chapter two explores the origins of BLM, the strategies it uses to reach its goals, and the results it has achieved.

When George Zimmerman was acquitted of killing (African American) Travon Martin in 2013, Patrice Cullors, Alicia Garza, and Opal Tometi created the hashtag #BlackLivesMatter on Twitter. They demanded change: they could no longer endure that innocent black lives, such as Eric Garner’s and Michael Brown’s, were unjustly being taken by white policemen (Ashburn-Nardo et al., 698). The hashtag quickly gained followers and developed into an actual social movement: the #BlackLivesMatter Movement. The movement is now “working for a world where Black lives are no longer systematically targeted for demise” (“Black Lives Matter”). Its goal is to encourage racial equality and justice in the post-segregation era (Rickford, 37), and to “intervene in violence inflicted on Black communities by the state and vigilantes” (“Black Lives Matter”). The movement ultimately wants “to continue […] building Black power across the country” (“Black Lives Matter”).

In order to reach this goal, BLM activists have mostly engaged in nonviolent protests, such as rallies and occupations of highways, schools, and police stations. Other activities include marches, and so-called “die-ins”: a variation on the “sit-in” during which participants lie on the ground as if they were deceased (Rickford, 36). Notable protests that have taken place since BLM’s establishment include the “Freedom Ride” in Ferguson in 2014, the “Say Her
Name” protests in 2015, and the Black Lives Matter Art Exhibition which is now planned to take place annually.

The movement is also known for its efforts to promote equality via social media. BLM posts most of its upcoming events on its Twitter account, for example, and it informs its followers about its stances and recent developments in the field via this medium as well (V. White, 5). This is a clever strategy, as the internet is where the movement was founded and where it has most of its followers. In this way, it is fairly easy for BLM’s leaders to communicate with the activists and to appeal to an even broader public. What, then, are the main issues the movement protests exactly?

2.2 RHETORIC

BLM is perhaps best-known for its resentment of police brutality and racial violence (Rickford, 35). African Americans are often treated disrespectfully by the (predominantly white) police, resulting in exorbitant violence against African Americans, unjust racial profiling and frisks, and even killings. Several studies have shown that over half of all police killings are people of color (Ghandnoosh, 3) and that blacks are being killed by the police at the same rate as lynchings did after the American Civil War (Larson quoted in V. White, 5). Aggravating the situation is the fact that such officers are seldom convicted for the excessive use of force and killings (Ghandnoosh, 3). In the case of Eric Garner, for instance, the African American was accused of selling cigarettes without tax stamps. When Garner told the police he was not selling cigarettes and did not like being accused unjustly, the police arrested him and forced him onto the ground. One of the officers grabbed Garner by his neck, to which Garner repeatedly replied that he could not breathe. Garner lost his consciousness due to oxygen deficiency and died in the hospital less than an hour later. The officer responsible for Garner’s death was not indicted (García and Sharif, 27-28). BLM believes that white people are less likely to be treated in such an extreme manner by the authorities. According to the Sentencing Project, a non-profit organization that researches and advocates for reform, there are two reasons for this phenomenon. First, seemingly race-neutral laws and policies, such as stop-and-frisks and “broken windows” (i.e. troubled neighborhoods attract more trouble) appear to affect people of color more than white people – both intentionally and unintentionally. Second, police officers are often influenced by racial bias. They are therefore more likely to search black people’s vehicles, more likely to arrest black people, and more willing to use force against black people (Ghandnoosh, 5-10).
Another one of BLM’s main concerns is mass incarceration of African Americans. Research has shown that incarceration has become “a common life event” for black men (Petitt and Western, 164). This is unprecedented: according to Dr. Michelle Alexander, the author of *The New Jim Crow*, “there are more blacks under correctional control than there were in slavery in 1850” (quoted in Larson, 44). How is this possible?

The answer lies with Ronald Reagan’s War On Drugs, which was initiated in 1982. The president’s campaign generated a “moral panic” about the threat of black crime and violence (Larson, 44). While the campaign resulted in a declining rate of illegal drug use, incarceration rates skyrocketed. Regrettably, incarceration rates disproportionately affected black Americans: African Americans were imprisoned at rates twenty to fifty times faster than people of other races (Alexander, 5). Larson, researcher at Princeton University, adds to this that the usage of such “law and order” became the new way of policing minorities for white people (Larson, 44). This political structure, which Alexander calls “The New Jim Crow”, is still in place today because large numbers of African Americans are unjustly labeled “criminals” and therefore relegated to a permanent second-class status in society (Alexander, 14). In this respect, the War On Drugs is arguably a War On African Americans.

The movement also supports black pride and therefore positions itself as “unapologetically black” (“Black Lives Matter”). They believe they need not qualify their position in society, as white people do not have to do so either. Rickford adds that this stance suggests the movement does not take “politics of respectability” in consideration, meaning BLM members do not want to adhere to white conventional standards even if these are deemed ‘normal’ (Rickford, 36). Black people should not have to change because society believes they should. The BLM site concludes that “to love and desire freedom and justice for ourselves is a prerequisite for wanting the same for others” (“Black Lives Matter”).

BLM believes *all* black lives matter. As such, BLM is also concerned with the inclusion of marginalized groups within the black community. Such groups include lesbians, transgenders, gays, and other members of the LGBTQ+ community (i.e. Lesbians, Gays, Bisexuals, Transgenders, Queers, and others). One of the reasons these groups are often further marginalized within the black community is because “Black churches are guilty of rejecting and spiritually bullying persons who are LGBTQ” (Smith, 353). This is problematic according to the movement, as it creates “internal attacks from inside the Black community, which creates self-deprecation and defamation” (Smith, 353). BLM believes that every black life matters and that it is important to include these groups in its efforts, regardless of sex, gender identity, and
sexual expression, but also regardless of religion, disability, and economic situation (“Black Lives Matter”).

Furthermore, BLM focusses its efforts on discrimination in education, the workplace, and health care. Many black people first encounter racism and discrimination in elementary school. Academically speaking, teachers expect less of black children than white children, for example. Their tests and assignments are also evaluated in a tougher manner and they are suspended from school faster than white children (Ashburn-Nardo et al., 699). Such racial biases do not stop here: they are continued into higher education as well. Blacks receive fewer scholarships, are underrepresented in higher education, and experience more isolation and discrimination in college (Ashburn-Nardo et al., 699-700). After African Americans finish their education, they reencounter discrimination in the workplace and it already starts during the selection phase. People with ‘obvious minority names’ are less likely to receive call-backs on their applications than people with standard white names (Ashburn-Nardo et al., 700). African Americans also receive less promotions and are less often appraised for their performances (Ashburn-Nardo et al., 700). In addition, many African Americans experience discrimination in health care: an institution which most people trust to be colorblind. In practice, however, the term colorblind is not even close to the truth. Black people receive poorer health care than whites, for instance, and doctors are not trained well enough to detect certain illnesses on black people: a survey among dermatologists indicated that more than 50 percent was not trained to detect skin cancer on black skin (Ashburn-Nardo et al., 701).

The last important theme in BLM discourse is white supremacy. BLM is against white patriarchal norms in society: society should be colorblind. According to Alicia Garza, one of the founders of BLM, it is understandable that white people benefit from white privilege, but it is not fair. She states it is not just to eradicate an ethnicity and to put them into “boxes of normality defined by white privilege” (Garza, 2-3). White supremacy devalues black lives, which creates the idea in society that black lives do not matter (Garza, 3). It sets problems such as discrimination in education and police brutality in motion and it is therefore a major concern to BLM.

2.3 POLITICAL RESULTS

Although BLM is not even close to reaching its goal, quite some progress was made as a result of its efforts. A number of police officers have been charged and disciplined for violence against African Americans, for example (Rickford, 36). Rickford suggests that this means that “popular
outcry can help force concessions from even the most repressive system” (Rickford, 36). This offers BLM a bright future. The BLM website adds that other successes include that BLM members “have ousted anti-Black politicians, won critical legislation to benefit Black lives, and changed the terms of the debate on Blackness around the world” (“Black Lives Matter”). They acknowledge that there is still a long way to go, but they are glad they have “shifted culture with an eye toward the dangerous impacts of anti-Blackness” (“Black Lives Matter”).

Recapitulating, BLM was established as a result of the death of Trayvon Martin, a young African American who was killed by a white policeman. The movement’s main issue was (white) police brutality against African Americans, but their concerns soon included subjects such as mass incarceration of black people, racism, and discrimination in education and the workplace, as well. The movement has reached some successes, such as various instances of convictions for policemen, but is still nowhere near its goal: encouraging racial equality and justice in the post-segregation era (Rickford, 37). In the Introduction, I hypothesized that there would probably be similarities in the themes BLM and hip hop from the #BlackLivesMatter Era discuss. The next chapter will therefore explore recurring sociopolitical themes in hip hop music from the #BlackLivesMatter Era.
“The thing about hip hop today is it’s smart, it’s insightful. The way they can communicate a complex message in a very short space is remarkable.”

- Barack Obama

### 3.1 Kendrick Lamar

This chapter explores hip hop artists Kendrick Lamar and J. Cole and the main sociopolitical issues they present in their music. A study on hip hop music and the #BlackLivesMatter Movement would not be complete without Kendrick Lamar. His album, *To Pimp A Butterfly* (2015), was adopted as the movement’s musical centerpiece by its supporters (Blum, 141). Apart from the album’s politicized lyrics, the artist’s live performances and video clips also portray strong sociopolitical messages. As visuals have become increasingly important in this era, the case study of Kendrick Lamar consists of a lyrical analysis of his 2015 album, as well as a visual analysis of his 2016 Grammy performance and his video clip for the song *Alright* (2015). Close readings of these case studies have brought forth eight sociopolitical themes: mass incarceration, racism and white supremacy, capitalism, slavery, police brutality, the ghetto, rap talent, and racial uplift. These themes will be discussed in detail in the following section. Please note that the full analyses of the albums, music videos, and live performances can be found at the back of this thesis in appendixes 3 through 5.

As described in chapter 2, mass incarceration rates have increased drastically over the last four decades and have disproportionately and unfairly affected black Americans (Larson, 44; Alexander, 5). Kendrick Lamar grew up in a ghetto saw his friends and family being arrested numerous times. He therefore did not hesitate to comment on mass incarceration of African Americans in his works, naming words such as jail, chains, bars, and incarceration often. In his song *The Blacker the Berry*, Lamar argues that white judges get to decide about the amount of time someone will have to serve in prison too easily. They punish black people like time is nothing, but the impact it can have is immense: “the judge make time, you know that, the judge make time right? The judge make time so it ain’t shit” (Kendrick Lamar, appendix 3.13). Lamar also made a monumental statement against mass incarceration of black men during his 2016 Grammy Awards performance by walking out on stage in line with a couple of African
American men wearing chains, while other black men were jailed along the sides of the stage (Kendrick Lamar, appendix 5, images 1-2). As the performance progresses, Lamar and the other men break free from their chains and start dancing in an indigenous African dance style, thereby suggesting African Americans should be able to express their culture freely and not be incarcerated for it.

Another major theme in Lamar’s music is racism and white supremacy. Lamar comments on white supremacy in his song The Blacker the Berry, in which he states that “light don’t mean you smart, bein’ dark don’t make you stupid” (Kendrick Lamar, appendix 3.12). Stereotyping black people is a racist problem as these stereotypes are often denigrating towards African Americans. Examples named in Lamar’s include the ‘mammy’ stereotype of a big black woman working in a white household (Kendrick Lamar, appendix 3.3), the idea that all black men are either called Tyrone or Darius (Kendrick Lamar, appendix 3.13), and the overall sentiment that black people only consume watermelon, chicken, and Kool-Aid (Kendrick Lamar, appendix 3.13). Lamar concludes states that racism has become structural in the United States: “this plot is bigger than me, it's generational hatred” (Kendrick Lamar, appendix 3.13). The argument here is that racism has been a part of America since the institution of slavery and that it has been passed on generation by generation.

Lamar addresses the downsides of capitalism as well. Wesley’s Theory, for example, speaks from the point of view of bosses of big corporations who do not care about their employees and their careers, but only about the money the employees make them:

*I can see the dollar in you*

*Little white lies, but it's no white-collar in you*

*But it's whatever though because I'm still followin' you*

*Because you make me live forever, baby*

*Count it all together, baby*

*Then hit the register and make me feel better, baby* (Kendrick Lamar, appendix 3.1)

And in How Much a Dollar Cost, Kendrick Lamar asks himself how much a dollar is really worth, because everyone seems to be obsessed with money. He concludes that the only thing you need to stay alive is air, not money (Kendrick Lamar, appendix 3.11). Further references
to capitalism the artist makes are words like mall, C-notes (slang for hundred dollar bills), and green (the color of a dollar bill).

Another theme that is mentioned often throughout Lamar’s work is the institution of slavery, of which the history still haunts African Americans today. This becomes clear from the lines:

\[
\begin{align*}
I & \text{ said they treat me like a slave, cah' me black} \\
\text{Woi, we feel a whole heap of pain, cah' we black} \\
\text{And man a say they put me inna chains, cah' we black} \\
\text{Imagine now, big gold chains full of rocks} \\
\text{How you no see the whip, left scars pon' me back}
\end{align*}
\]

(Kendrick Lamar, appendix 3.13)

Lamar suggests the marks of the whip, a strip of leather with which slaves were punished, are still visible in today’s society. African Americans still feel the burden of slavery and are still treated badly, or as Lamar says, still treated like a slave. Lamar made a similar statement with his live performance of The Blacker the Berry and Alright at the Grammy’s by coming out on stage in chains (Kendrick Lamar, appendix 5, images 1-2). These chains could represent America’s prison nation, but they are reminiscent of slave chains as well. This suggests that Lamar believes mass incarceration of black people is comparable to the horrors of slavery.

Lamar also often refers to words that are a part of slavery, such as cotton, master (Kendrick Lamar, appendix 3.12), whip, and slave (Kendrick Lamar, appendix 3.13).

As chapter 2 outlined, police brutality against African Americans is a big problem in the United States. Kendrick Lamar has experienced police violence closely himself and comments on the violence inflicted against black people by white policemen in his works frequently. In Lamar’s music video for Alright, for instance, a black man is violently manhandled against the wall by a policeman. When the man escapes, the officer immediately shoots him (Kendrick Lamar, appendix 4, images 10-12). Lamar does not think the police would have pulled the trigger if the scene had concerned a white person. Later in the video, there is a scene that shows Lamar dancing on top of a street light. A white police officer pulls up in his police car and gets out of the car with a rifle. Instead of using this rifle, the officer makes a gun using his fingers. The officer shoots Lamar with the finger gun and the rapper falls to the ground (Kendrick Lamar, appendix 4, images 16-19). This scene makes several strong statements. First, black
people can literally do nothing wrong (dancing) and still be arrested, hurt, or killed by the police. Second, the fact the policeman chooses not to use his rifle might hint at the fact that officers have killed black people with their bare hands (e.g. Eric Garner) as well. Events such as the ones portrayed in Lamar’s music video intimidate black people. Lamar is convinced that police officers are only out to kill black people, for example (Kendrick Lamar, appendix 3.7).

Police brutality also fosters hatred against the police among African Americans. This is something the rappers comment on in their music as well. In *i*, Kendrick Lamar admits he wants to shoot the police in the back (Kendrick Lamar, appendix 3.15) and in his video clip for *Alright* he demolishes a police car and lets black children jump on top of it (Kendrick Lamar, appendix 4, images 8-9). Another scene of the music video shows white policemen carrying a car in which Lamar and his black friends are dancing. Lamar makes a last strong statement against police violence by doing this: the real oppressor (police) is being oppressed by the real life oppressed.

Ghetto culture is discussed in detail in Lamar’s album as well. In *Complexion (A Zulu Love)*, Kendrick Lamar raps “I don’t see Compton, I see something much worse. The land of the landmines, the hell that’s on earth” (Kendrick Lamar, appendix 3.12). He suggests that the ghetto is a manifestation of evil on earth. The ghetto is overflown with drugs: “yams”, “soap”, and “doja” are being sold, for example, which is slang for heroin, cocaine, and marijuana respectively (Kendrick Lamar, appendix 3.3). Lamar dealt in drugs when he lived in the ghetto, even though he knew it was wrong: “numb the pain 'cause it's hard for a felon. In my mind I been cryin’, know it's wrong but I'm sellin’” (Kendrick Lamar, appendix 3.2). These lyrics suggest that Lamar sold drugs to criminals and that he feels awful about it. He did not have a choice, however: it was the only way for him to survive in the ghetto.

Another problem related to ghetto culture is violence. Firstly, there is the problem of gang and black-on-black violence. In *Hood Politics*, Lamar recalls a scene from his youth in which “the little homies called and said, "the enemies done cliqued up"” (Kendrick Lamar, appendix 3.10). This memory describes how another gang had prepared to fight against Lamar’s gang. The formation of such gangs is often based on ethnicity and/or skin color (Ellis, 471). With the benefit of hindsight, Lamar wonders why he participated in such black-on-black violence and asks himself: “why did I [Kendrick Lamar; L.S.] weep when Trayvon Martin was in the street when gang banging make me kill a nigga blacker than me?” (Kendrick Lamar, appendix 3.13). Lamar subsequently thinks of himself as a hypocrite, because he is mad when black people such as Trayvon Martin are killed by white policemen, but he killed black people himself as well. Such violent encounters between gangs result in “fire in the streets”, “dead
homies”, bodies “laid on the concrete scattered like roaches”, “gunshots”, “a war outside”, “bomb in the street”, “gun in the hood”, and “mob of police” (Kendrick Lamar, appendixes 3.3, 3.10, 3.13, 3.15).

Lamar ultimately blames the United States for the problems in the ghetto, telling the government that “you [the government; L.S.] sabotage my community, makin' a killin'. You made me a killer, emancipation of a real nigga” (Kendrick Lamar, appendix 3.13). His argument is that the United States influences African Americans negatively by providing black people with less opportunities. Lamar says this only fuels violence in ghettos as racism and poverty leave them no choice. It is especially interesting that Lamar uses the word “emancipation”. This might hint at President Abraham Lincoln’s Emancipation Proclamation, which freed some three million slaves in 1863.

Something about which Lamar feels guilty is his rap talent. Having such a talent and being able to make money with it comes with several problems for the rapper. First, he has to deal with claims that he is not authentic anymore because he was able to move out of the ghetto. In You Ain’t Gotta Lie (Momma Said), for example, Lamar and his mother have a conversation about the realness of his music:

*Who you foolin’? Oh, you assuming you can just come and hang
With the homies but your level of realness ain't the same
Circus acts only attract those that entertain
Small talk, we know that it's all talk
We live in the Laugh Factory every time they mention your name* (Kendrick Lamar, appendix 3.14)

His mother says that everyone in the neighborhood laughs at Lamar because he raps about ghetto problems, but does not even live there anymore: he was able to move away from the ghetto with the money he earned rapping. People in the neighborhood claim that he cannot know what it is like in Compton if he is not there often. They question Lamar’s authenticity for this reason. Additionally, in the poem that Lamar recites throughout his album, he talks about how he constantly has to keep reminding himself that he earned his career and that he tries to return to the ghetto as often as possible:

*So I went running for answers
Until I came home*
But that didn’t stop survivor’s guilt

> Going back and forth trying to convince myself the stripes I earned (Kendrick Lamar, 3.10)

As follows, the rapper is finding it difficult to balance being happy about his career with staying in touch with his roots and being an advocate for a good cause.

Besides the hardships described above, the artist ultimately only wants to communicate one message: “we gon’ be alright” (Kendrick Lamar, appendix 3.7). He does not want black people to be slaves in their minds (Kendrick Lamar, appendix 3.16): he wants to encourage black people to smile, express themselves, and incite change. This encouraging message was very clear in Lamar’s video clip and live performance. Kendrick’s smile after being shot at the end of his video clip tells the viewer to keep smiling and to keep hoping, even when bad things happen (Kendrick Lamar, appendix 4, image 19). The transition from *The Blacker the Berry* to *Alright* during Lamar’s Grammy performance is also significant: whereas the former is a quite negative song, the latter is all about racial uplift. Performing these songs consecutively creates a ‘feel-good’ story and sends out a positive message that everything will be okay in the end.

### 3.2 J. COLE

J. Cole is considered in this chapter because much of his music is a response to events that inspired the (growth of the) #BlackLivesMatter Movement. His song *Be Free* (2014), for example, is a response to the shooting and death of Michael Brown in Ferguson, Missouri in 2014 (Payne). The case study for J. Cole consists of a lyrical analysis of his last album *4 Your Eyez Only* (2016), an analysis of his live performance of *Be Free* at Late Night with David Letterman, and an analysis of his music video for the song *Neighbors* (2017). Close readings of these case studies have brought forth themes similar to the themes identified in Kendrick Lamar’s music: mass incarceration, white supremacy, capitalism, slavery, police brutality, the ghetto, rap talent, and mobilization. These themes will be discussed in detail in the following section. Please note that the full analyses of the albums, music videos, and live performances can be found at the back of this thesis in appendixes 6 through 8.

On the subject of mass incarceration, J. Cole comments on how black people are perpetually captured in America’s prison nation and what the results of that are: “much broader than the corner, if not it's gon' corner you, into a box, where your son don't even know his pops. And the cyclical nature of doing time continues” (J. Cole, appendix 6.10). The result thus is that children grow up without one or both of their parents and that a downward spiral develops.
in which generations will be incarcerated. Another result according to J. Cole is that when friends are arrested, others will have to take care of this person’s family and the gang will be left behind weaker (J. Cole, appendix 6.2). Cole adds to this that incarcerating black people only worsens poverty, and therefore crime, in *4 Your Eyez Only*: “affected by the mass incarceration in this nation that sent your pops to prison when he needed education” (J. Cole, appendix 6.10). As explained in chapter 2, black people are often denied the chance of receiving scholarships and can therefore not go to college or university (Ashburn-Nardo, 699-700). J. Cole therefore suggests that if black people received the chance to go to college in the first place, they could work better jobs and poverty rates would decline. This would indirectly lower crime rates and thus mass incarceration of African Americans.

J. Cole also thinks white supremacy is a big problem in the United States. He believes America’s white population feels they are superior to black people as a result of structural racism in America. White people seem to decide everything in the country: “their” English is better than African American Vernacular English (J. Cole, appendix 6.8), they are in charge of hiring and firing people (J. Cole, appendix 7), and they are in control of America’s prison nation: “as if He's spiteful like them white folks that control the jail” (J. Cole, appendix 6.6).

Similar to Lamar, J. Cole frequently raps about capitalist America in his music, because the government and large companies are only concerned with earning as much money as possible, while ghettos are struck by poverty. In *She’s Mine, Pt. 2*, J. Cole describes his concern:

*Handcuffs keep huggin’ the, wrists of my niggas
And I wish stuff was different here
But if I had a magic wand to make the evil disappear
That means that there would be no Santa Claus no more
To bring you Christmas cheer
’Cause what he represents is really greed
And the need to purchase shit from corporations
That make a killin’ because they feed
On the wallets of the poor who be knockin’ on they door
Every Black Friday just to get some shit they can’t afford
Even with the discount, write a check, that shit bounce
But as long as we got credit, it don’t matter, the amount
We just swipin’ shit here, we don’t love, we just likin’ shit here* (J. Cole, appendix 6.9)
According to J. Cole, holidays like Christmas and Thanksgiving are purely excuses for companies to sell products and customers buying these products are spending their money as if it were nothing. The problem here is that these customers and companies are well aware of the fact that there are many people in ghettos struggling to make ends meet: they are poor and arrested as a result of poverty-related crimes, such as stealing money and products from shops. Another statement against capitalism are the symbols ‘F.S.S.❤’ printed on the sweater J.Cole wore during his performance of Be Free at the Late Show with David Letterman. The symbols represent the words ‘fuck money, spread love’ (J. Cole, appendix 7). The message here is clear: people should be less concerned with money and capitalism, and pay more attention to spreading love and kindness among society.

While J. Cole does not address the aftermath of the institution of slavery, he does make some interesting connections between slavery and the sociopolitical environment in the U.S. today. The most frequently used metaphor for referring to slavery in Cole’s music is the word ‘chains’. A clear example is the usage of ‘chains’ in J. Cole’s Be Free, in which he argues the only thing African Americans want to do is the following: “all we wanna do is break the chains off. All we wanna do is be free” (J. Cole, appendix 7). In these lines, J. Cole is talking about the oppression of black people in the United States. They figuratively want to break free from the chains that hold them down in society. The lyrics cleverly draw a parallel between what is happening in society right now and slavery 300 years ago. This connects a certain kind of gravity to the contemporary situation, claiming society is doing the same thing right now as it was during times of slavery.

Police brutality is also a frequently recurring theme in J. Cole’s works. It appears as if he fears the police: he claims that black people should watch out for the police because “they love to serve a nigga three hot and a cot” (J. Cole, appendix 6.2). “Three hot and a cot” refers to the meals a felon receives in prison and it seems like the police does not mind serving black people food as long as they are in jail. Cole also raps in his song Neighbors that “every nigga feel like a candidate for a Trayvon kinda fate” (J. Cole, appendix 6.7). This is a reference to Trayvon Martin, the African American boy who was killed by the police and consequently inspired the establishment of the #BlackLivesMatter Movement. In the song, J. Cole expresses his fear of being killed by the police.

Similar to Kendrick Lamar, J. Cole also grew up in a ghetto. Whereas Lamar grew up in Compton, J. Cole grew up on the other side of the country: Fayetteville, North Carolina. The difference in location does not seem to matter, however, for the way in which the ghetto and its culture is described by the artists: J. Cole, too, compares the ghetto to hell. In 4 Your Eyez Only,
J. Cole raps “to see this is like the farthest thing from heaven. This is hell and I don't mean that hyperbolic” (J. Cole, appendix 6.10). Important factors that contaminate the ghetto according to J. Cole are drugs, violence, crime, and murder.

On the subjects of rap talent, J. Cole struggles with survivor’s guilt as well. J. Cole is a “nigga that could sing” (J. Cole, appendix 6.7) and who was able to build his dream house away from the ghetto. The second problem, then, is that for both of these rappers, their success comes with survivor’s guilt. In She’s Mine, Pt. 2, J. Cole literally asks himself whether he is “worthy of this gift” (J. Cole, appendix 6.9).

J. Cole finally urges his listeners take action: if black people want to see change in America, they should start with themselves. In Change, he argues that “the only real change comes from inside” and that life is all about the evolution (i.e. changing yourself; J. Cole, appendix 6.6). He finally wants to encourage African Americans to come into action in Be Free: “somethings got me down, I will stand my ground. Don't just stand around, don't just stand around” (J. Cole, appendix 7).

In the end, Kendrick Lamar and J. Cole do not only want to protest the current state of affairs, but also stimulate positivity among African Americans. A change in the carceral system, America’s racist society, or treatment by policemen will not occur as long as African Americans do not take action themselves. While doing so, it is important to keep the future in mind and to remain positive. How do these ideas relate to BLM? Chapter 4 looks at similarities and differences between BLM and contemporary hip hop music in the approach to sociopolitical issues by means of comparing and contrasting the observations made in chapters 2 and 3.
CHAPTER 4: THE RELATION BETWEEN BLM AND CONTEMPORARY HIP HOP

“Art can play a major role. Music has always pushed ahead social movements.”

- Saul Williams
Slam Poet

The first chapter of this thesis set out a theoretical framework for understanding the intersection between music and protest, and hip hop and protest. A case study of hip hop music from the 1980s, the decade in which hip hop first gained popularity, contextualized the theory and proved that hip hop was originally a form of social criticism on the racist attitudes against and the subordinate position of African Americans in society.

The chapter that followed discussed BLM, which is a movement that aims to encourage racial equality and justice in the post-segregation era (Rickford, 37). The reason for this is that the movement believes African Americans are mistreated in many respects, such as the fact that African Americans are incarcerated at unprecedented rates and that they are more often victim to police brutality than white people, for example. The movement tries to reach its goal by mobilizing people online and organizing peaceful protests, such as “die-ins”.

The third chapter illustrated sociopolitical themes that were mentioned frequently in contemporary hip hop music. Since I hypothesized these themes would overlap with BLM, the following chapter discusses similarities and differences between BLM and contemporary hip hop music.

4.1 SIMILARITIES

The main similarity between BLM and contemporary hip hop appears to be the issues they address. The sociopolitical themes analyzed in chapter 3 can be connected to BLM’s rhetoric in a number of ways. Mass incarceration of African Americans, denial of education, white supremacy, and police brutality are all topics discussed in Kendrick Lamar’s and J. Cole’s music which BLM wants to bring to the public’s attention as well.

On the subject of mass incarceration, the artists’ lyrics disclose how many black people are in prison and how easily white people “make time” for them. This is very much in line with BLM’s mass incarceration rhetoric, which claims African Americans are imprisoned at rates
twenty to fifty times faster than people of other races (Alexander, 5). The lyrics about mass incarceration also suggest that black people should not be incarcerated: they should be educated. As BLM activists argue, black people are often denied scholarships and can therefore not afford to go to college or university (Ashburn-Nardo, 699-700). The result is that African Americans cannot make a living and have to resort to crime to be able to live. The music suggests that poverty rates would decline if African Americans would be accepted into more colleges, because they would be able to get a better-paid job. This would indirectly affect crime rates and thus mass incarceration of African Americans.

White supremacy is also one of the overlapping concerns. The artists claim white people get to work better jobs, can fire anyone they want to, and are in charge of America’s prison nation. This is eventually all exhibited in the worst form of white supremacy: police violence against black people. Another form of white supremacy is the idea that white is smart and black is stupid (Kendrick Lamar, appendix 3.12), which again ties in with the notion that black people do not deserve an education. To BLM, white supremacy is a major problem. The movement believes black people should not have to adhere to white chauvinistic norms, because it results in a devaluation of black lives and culture (Garza, 3). This would affect problems such as racism and police brutality in return and it is therefore one of America’s core problems regarding race.

BLM is also deeply concerned about police brutality and the rate at which African Americans are harassed and killed by white policemen. This type of brutality is described and displayed very vividly in the analyzed music (videos). In the videos, the viewer is presented with white policemen manhandling and shooting black people, and the lyrics describe the fear African Americans feel towards the police. The rappers express their concern that they might end up like Trayvon Martin: the African American who inspired the establishment of BLM. The mutual agenda of hip hop and BLM is very evident here.

While subjects such as ghettos and slavery are not necessarily things BLM is concerned about, they remain results of structural racism and white supremacy in the United States. In this way, these subjects can still be connected to BLM. In the end, however, both hip hop and BLM only seem to share one goal: mobilize black people in order to further the black cause, because black lives matter.

**4.2 DIFFERENCES**

There is one big difference between BLM and contemporary hip hop music that needs to be addressed critically, however. The way in which the issues described above are approached is handled differently. The reason for this is the very nature of the form of social criticism: there
is a difference between putting political criticism into an artistic framework, such as a hip hop song, and BLM forms of protest. As explained in chapter 2, BLM is an actual social movement that wants to get its message across by physically protesting and organizing non-violent events, such as marches, occupations, and “die-ins”.

Hip hop, on the other hand, is merely a mode of expression: it does not necessarily organize protest. If anything, contemporary hip hop’s explicitness is even at odds with BLM’s peaceful disposition. In addition, it is important to keep in mind that hip hop remains a commercial undertaking that uses videos, concerts, and other platforms for marketing purposes. According to H. Lavar Pope, “rap artists and labels […] sell the[ir] product to consumers through marketing schemes and advertising”, such as producing “song[s] [that are; L.S.] designed to be a hit single” (Pope, 79). In this regard, the true goal of hip hop can be questioned: is it truly about furthering the black cause or is money the main incentive?

The motive cannot be determined with certainty, but assuming the artists discussed in this thesis are genuinely concerned about the black race, contemporary hip hop could be seen as an aid to BLM. As explained in chapter 1, music can serve as a means of “highlighting social ills, recommending solutions to problems, serving as a form of political propaganda, recruiting members for a cause, or contributing toward feelings of solidarity” (Denisoff quoted in Damodaran, 6). Therefore, hip hop can be of value to BLM in the sense that it can help promote the movement. This is what Kendrick Lamar and J. Cole are basically already doing: they are encouraging people to not “just stand around” (J. Cole, appendix 7). In this way, contemporary hip hop could perhaps best be considered a stepping stone to BLM, rather than an agent of change. Ultimately, while the natures of BLM and contemporary hip hop are essentially different, many similarities can be found in the issues protested.
CONCLUSION

“Our art is a reflection of our reality.”

- Ice Cube
  Member N.W.A.
  From: Straight Outta Compton (2015)

This thesis sought to answer the research question: What is the sociopolitical message of hip hop music in the #BlackLivesMatter Era? In the process of studying the subject of hip hop, I explored protest music and the way in which hip hop demonstrates sociopolitical protest through N.W.A., Public Enemy, Kendrick Lamar, and J. Cole. I also studied the #BlackLivesMatter Movement and compared it to hip hop music from the #BlackLivesMatter Era.

Before starting this research, I expected to find that today’s hip hop still expresses protest and that there are significant similarities between sociopolitical themes discussed in contemporary hip hop music and sociopolitical themes in BLM’s rhetoric. I can confirm this hypothesis and conclude that Kendrick Lamar and J. Cole rap about issues in America’s sociopolitical environment just as much as N.W.A. and Public Enemy did in the 1980s. The subjects they tackle(d) are naturally different: times and sociopolitical environments change. Hip hop from the #BlackLivesMatter Era focusses mostly on mass incarceration of African Americans, white supremacy, denial of education, and mobilizing African Americans to do something about the racist sociopolitical environment. In this way, BLM and contemporary hip hop are very much alike: they both want to further the black cause. Yet, as critically addressed in chapter 4, the true motivation behind hip hop can be questioned. It was therefore established that hip hop could best function as an aid to BLM, rather than as an agent of change. The message, however, remains unchanged. In answering the research question I can therefore conclude that the sociopolitical message of hip hop music in the #BlackLivesMatter Era is exactly what the name of the movement already suggests: black lives matter and America’s racist attitude needs to change. This change will, however, not come out of nowhere and African Americans will need to take action themselves.

As I briefly mentioned in the Introduction, I was very prejudiced about hip hop music before starting this research because of its explicit nature. Having studied the subject on an
academic level completely altered my views. The explicitness has been justified to me: the struggles that many African Americans face every day are truly shocking. It is therefore no surprise that these people are aggrivated and express via in their music. I have come to realize that rappers actually communicate hopeful messages through their music.

The enthusiasm sparked by this research has led me to think of further suggestions for research in the field. Firstly, many more artists’ albums could be analyzed. These albums’ sociopolitical themes could then be compared and contrasted in order to gain an even better insight on the message of hip hop. For the sake of the scope of this thesis, this was sadly not possible. More decades and/or eras, such as the 1990s and 2000s, could also be examined in order to study the course and development of the message of hip hop music through the years. Another idea could be to analyze messages in hip hop music based on audio content, as I noticed that some of the songs analyzed in this thesis made use of “musical” elements such as gunshots. I would finally like to encourage the reader(s) of this thesis to watch Childish Gambino’s video clip for the song *This is America*. Childish Gambino is a hip hop artist who recently released a very controversial video clip for the song *This is America*. The clip showcases blackface, police brutality, shootings of black people, and many more shocking, yet important visuals. The music video was sadly released a little too late to incorporate into this thesis, but many interesting interpretations of the video can be found online. *Time Magazine*’s interpretation goes as deep into the video as analyzing each gunshot fired in the video separately, for example, and *Psychology Today* offers a racial analysis of the video. Such interpretations are definitely worth looking at, especially in the light of this thesis. Researching the video could be highly interesting, especially as its sociopolitical message is portrayed in such a violent manner. This is completely at odds with BLM, which emphasizes peaceful protest. Consequently, the effectiveness of both ways of protesting the sociopolitical environment, or the effectiveness of different forms of protest in general (e.g. music, film, or peaceful/violent protests), could be compared and contrasted.


### APPENDIX 1: N.W.A. – STRAIGHT OUTTA COMPTON (1988)

The following listening charts are close readings of the songs on N.W.A.’s album *Straight Outta Compton* (1988). The focus of the lyrical analyses is on the sociopolitical content of the lyrics. Lyrics highlighted in yellow on the left side are further explained on the right side. All lyrics have been acquired through *Genius*, an online database for lyrics and musical knowledge.

*Genius | Song Lyrics & Knowledge, Genius Media Group Inc., 2018, genius.com/**

1. **Straight Outta Compton**

   **[Intro: Dr. Dre]**
   You are now about to witness the strength of street knowledge

   **[Verse 1: Ice Cube]**
   Straight outta Compton, crazy motherfucker named Ice Cube
   From the gang called Niggas Wit Attitudes
   When I'm called off, I got a sawed-off Squeeze the trigger and bodies are hauled off
   You too, boy, if you fuck with me
   The police are gonna have to come and get me
   Off your ass, that's how I'm going out
   For the punk motherfuckers that's showing out
   Niggas start to mumble, they wanna rumble
   Mix 'em and cook 'em in a pot, like gumbo
   Going off on the motherfucker like that
   With a gat that's pointed at your ass
   So give it up smooth
   Ain't no telling when I'm down for a jack move
   Here's a murder rap to keep y'all dancin'
   With a crime record like Charles Manson
   AK-47 is the tool
   Don't make me act a motherfucking fool
   Me you can go toe to toe, no maybe
   I'm knocking niggas out the box, daily
   Yo, weekly, monthly and yearly
   Until them dumb motherfuckers see clearly
   That I'm down with the capital C-P-T
   Boy, you can't fuck with me
   So when I'm in your neighborhood, you better duck
   ‘Cause Ice Cube is crazy as fuck
   As I leave, believe I'm stompin'
   But when I come back boy, I'm coming straight outta Compton
   (Compton Compton Compton)

   **[Interlude: Eazy E (MC Ren)]**
   Yo, Ren! (Whassup?)
   Tell 'em where you from!

   **[Verse 2: MC Ren]**
   Straight outta Compton, another crazy ass nigga

   The listener is invited to engage with knowledge (about racism) obtained by living in the streets of Compton.

   Ice Cube claims he is from Compton: a city with a uniquely large black population (Sides, 594) near Los Angeles, California associated with poverty, crime, and drugs.

   Relating to weapons and gun violence.

   First time the word ‘police’ is mentioned on the album.

   The N-word is considered incredibly disrespectful. It is, however, “accepted” by the black community if it is uttered by a black person.

   Famous American murderer. A weapon.

   Duality in the word ‘down’: he is solidary with Compton (C-P-T), but also sad about Compton.

   Madness.

   Taking pride in being from Compton, but also using it to claim agency.
More punks I smoke, yo, my rep gets bigger
I'm a bad motherfucker, and you know this
But the pussy-ass niggas won't show this
I don't give a fuck, I'm make my snaps
If not from the records, from jacking or craps
Just like burglary, the definition is jacking
And when I'm legally armed it's called packing
Shoot a motherfucker in a minute
I find a good piece of pussy and go up in it
So if you're at a show in the front row
I'ma call you a bitch or dirty-ass ho
You'll probably get mad like a bitch is supposed to
But that shows me, slut, you're composed to
A crazy motherfucker from the street
Attitude legit, 'cause I'm tearing up shit
MC Ren controls the automatic
For any dumb motherfucker that starts static
Not the right hand, 'cause I'm the hand itself
Every time I pull an AK off the shelf
The security is maximum, and that's a law
R-E-N spells Ren, but I'm raw
See, 'cause I'm the motherfucking villain
The definition is clear, you're the witness of a killin'
That's taking place without a clue
And once you're on the scope, your ass is through
Look, you might take it as a trip
But a nigga like Ren is on a gangsta tip
Straight outta Compton
(Compton Compton Compton)
(Straight outta Compton)

[Interlude: Dr. Dre]
Eazy is his name, and the boy is coming...

[Verse 3: Eazy E]
...Straight outta Compton

Is a brother that'll smother your mother
And make your sister think I love her
Dangerous motherfucker raising hell
And if I ever get caught, I make bail
See, I don't give a fuck, that's the problem
I see a motherfucking cop, I don't dodge him
But I'm smart, lay low, creep a while
And when I see a punk pass, I smile
To me it's kinda funny, the attitude showing a nigga driving
But don't know where the fuck he's going, just rolling
Looking for the one they call Eazy
But here's a flash, they'll never seize me
Ruthless, never seen, like a shadow in the dark
Except when I unload

He does not have a criminal record from car-jacking or playing craps: a gambling game. Urban slang for carrying a weapon on oneself invisibly.

His speech is authentic, because he is from Compton and has experienced Compton.

Abbreviation of AK-47: a weapon.

‘Tripping’ is urban slang for being under the influence of drugs.
MC Ren restates that he is from Compton.

Dr. Dre announces that Eazy E will start rapping and that he is from Compton as well.

Explicit language towards the police. He also indicates he does not care about the police here. This made the album controversial.

He will outsmart the police if necessary.
People like Eazy E are at the periphery of society: invisible.
You see a spark and jump over hesitation
And hear the scream of the one who got the lead penetration
Feel a little gust of wind and I'm jetting
But leave a memory no one'll be forgetting
So what about the bitch who got shot? Fuck her!
You think I give a damn about a bitch? I ain't a sucker
This is an autobiography of the E
And if you ever fuck with me
You'll get taken by a stupid dope brother who will smother
Word to the motherfucker, straight outta Compton
(Compton Compton Compton)
(Straight outta Compton)

[Outro]
Damn, that shit was dope!

Reinforces the truth of the narrative in the song.
Restating agency and authority.

2. Fuck Tha Police
[Produced by Dr. Dre & DJ Yella]

[Intro: The D.O.C., Dr. Dre, and Ice Cube]
Right about now, N.W.A. court is in full effect
Judge Dre presiding
In the case of N.W.A. versus the Police Department
Prosecuting attorneys are MC Ren, Ice Cube
And Eazy - motherfucking - E
Order, order, order!
Ice Cube, take the motherfucking stand
Do you swear to tell the truth, the whole truth
And nothing but the truth to help your black ass?
You goddamn right!
Well, won't you tell everybody what the fuck you gotta say?

[Verse 1: Ice Cube]
Fuck the police! Comin' straight from the underground
A young nigga got it bad 'cause I'm brown
And not the other color, so police think
They have the authority to kill a minority
Fuck that shit, 'cause I ain't the one
For a punk motherfucker with a badge and a gun
To be beatin', and thrown in jail
We can go toe-to-toe in the middle of a cell
Fuckin' with me 'cause I'm a teenager
With a little bit of gold and a pager
Searchin' my car, lookin' for the product
Thinkin' every nigga is sellin' narcotics

N.W.A. are satirizing the police and the judicial system. The group is acting as if there is a trial and they are prosecuting the Police Department.

Speaking out against the police. The ghetto or perhaps an allusion to the Underground Railroad.
A comment on police brutality against non-whites.
He tells the police (in explicit language) that he should not be the one who is beaten and incarcerated.

Racial prejudices.
You'd rather see me in the pen
Than me and Lorenzo rollin' in a Benz-o
Beat a police out of shape
And when I'm finished, bring the yellow tape
To tape off the scene of the slaughter
Still getting swoll off bread and water
I don't know if they fags or what
Search a nigga down, and grabbing his nuts
And on the other hand, without a gun, they can't get none
But don't let it be a black and a white one
'Cause they'll slam ya down to the street top
Black police showing out for the white cop
Ice Cube will swarm
On any motherfucker in a blue uniform
Just 'cause I'm from the CPT
Punk police are afraid of me
Huh, a young nigga on the warpath
And when I'm finished, it's gonna be a bloodbath
Of cops, dying in L.A
Yo, Dre, I got something to say

[Hook]
F*ck tha police!
F*ck tha police!
F*ck tha police!
F*ck tha police!

[Skit 1: Cop, MC Ren, & Dr. Dre]
Pull your goddamn ass over right now!
Aww shit, now, what the fuck you pullin' me over for?
'Cause I feel like it!
Just sit your ass on the curb and shut the fuck up!
Man, fuck this shit!
A'ight, smartass, I'm taking your black ass to jail!
MC Ren, will you please give your testimony to the jury about this f**ked up incident?

[Verse 2: MC Ren]
Fuck the police! And Ren said it with authority
Because the niggas on the street is a majority
A gang is with whoever I'm steppin'
And the motherf**kin' weapon is kept in
A stash box, for the so-called law
Wishing Ren was a nigga that they never saw
Lights start flashing behind me
But they're scared of a nigga, so they mace me
to blind me
But that shit don't work, I just laugh
Because it gives them a hint not to step in my path

Abbreviation for Compton.
He is on a mission to terminate the police.
Commenting on the fact that prosecuting black people without reason is deplorable.

“'The niggas on the street’ stands for the police, who are white and thus privileged. He also comments on how the authorities seem to think that he is a gangster as soon as he is accompanied by other (black) people.
For police, I'm saying, "Fuck you, punk!"

Reading my rights and shit, it's all junk
Pulling out a silly club, so you stand
With a fake-ass badge and a gun in your hand
But take off the gun so you can see what's up
And we'll go at it, punk, and I'ma fuck you up!
Make you think I'ma kick your ass
But drop your gat, and Ren's gonna blast
I'm sneaky as fuck when it comes to crime
Smoke any motherfucker that sweats me
Or any asshole that threatens me
I'm a sniper with a hell of a scope

Taking out a cop or two, they can't cope with me
The motherfucking villain that's mad
With potential to get bad as fuck
So I'ma turn it around
Put in my clip, yo, and this is the sound
(Gunshot sounds)
Yeah, somethin' like that
But it all depends on the size of the gat
Taking out a police would make my day
But a nigga like Ren don't give a fuck to say…

[Hook]
Fuck tha police!
Fuck tha police!
Fuck tha police!
Fuck tha police!

[Skit 2: Cop, Eazy-E, and Dr. Dre]
(Knocking sounds)
Yeah, man, what you need?
Police, open out!
Aww, shit
We have a warrant for Eazy-E's arrest
Get down and put your hands right where I can see 'em!
(Move, motherfucker, move now!)
What the fuck did I do, man? What did I do?
Just shut the fuck up
And get your motherfucking ass on the floor!
(You heard the man, shut the fuck up!)
But I didn't do shit
Man, just shut the fuck up!
Eazy-E, won't you step up to the stand
And tell the jury how you feel about this bullshit?

[Verse 3: Eazy-E & MC Ren]
I'm tired of the motherfucking' jackin'
Sweating my gang, while I'm chillin' in the shack, and
Shining the light in my face, and for what?

The police are obligated to state a person’s rights before arresting them. MC Ren states that these rights mean nothing when you are African American.

Threatening to kill the police.

They are talking about the fact that it is unfair that black people are sometimes arrested for no (clear) reason.

Comment on the unfair and random hearings/arrests/questions/etc. by policemen.
Maybe it's because I kick so much butt
I kick ass, or maybe 'cause I blast
On a stupid ass nigga when I'm playing with the
trigger
Of an Uzi or an AK

'Cause the police always got somethin' stupid to say
They put out my picture with silence
'Cause my identity by itself causes violence
The E with the criminal behavior
Yeah, I'm a gangsta, but still I got flavor

Without a gun and a badge, what do you got?
A sucker in a uniform waiting to get shot
By me, or another nigga
And with a gat, it don't matter if he's smaller or bigger
(Size don't mean shit, he's from the old school, fool!)

And as you all know, E's here to rule
Whenever I'm rollin', keep lookin' in the mirror
And ears on cue, yo, so I can hear a
Dumb motherfucker with a gun
And if I'm rollin' off the 8, he'll be the one
That I take out, and then get away
While I'm driving off laughing, this is what I'll say

[Hook]
Fuck tha police!
Fuck tha police!
Fuck tha police!
Fuck tha police!

[Skit 3: Dr. Dre, Cop]
The verdict:
The jury has found you guilty of being a redneck
White bread, chickenshit motherfucker
Wait, that's a lie! That's a goddamn lie!
Get him out of here!
I want justice!
Get him the fuck out my face!
I want justice!
Out, right now!
Fuck you, you black motherfuckers!

[Hook]
Fuck tha police!
Fuck tha police!
Fuck tha police!
Fuck tha police!
3. Gangsta Gangsta

[Skit: Krazy D + Eazy-E (Dr. Dre)]

*Sirens*

Ah shit. Man, them pinche black gangstas are at it again

I wonder who they fucked up today?

*Screeching Tires*

You motherfucker!

*Machine Gun Fire*

(Got him)

[Police + MC Ren]

Pull over to the side right now
Man, fuck them motherfuckers!

[Intro: Eazy-E + Sample]

Yo, Dre! Give me a funky-ass bassline!
Right here!

[Verse 1: Ice Cube]

Here's a little somethin' about a nigga like me

Never should've been let out the penitentiary

Ice Cube would like to say

That I'm a crazy motherfucker from around the way

Since I was a youth, I smoked weed out
Now I'm the motherfucker that you read about
Takin' a life or two, that's what the hell I do
You don't like how I'm livin'? Well, fuck you!

This is a gang and I'm in it
My man Dre'll fuck you up in a minute
With a right left, right left, you toothless
And then you say: "Goddamn, they ruthless!"

Everywhere we go they say: "Damn!"

N.W.A's fuckin' up the program
And then you realize we don't care
We don't just say no, we're too busy sayin',
"Yeah!"

About drinkin' straight out the eight bottle
Do I look like a motherfucker' role model?
To a kid lookin' up to me
Life ain't nothin' but bitches and money
'Cause I'm the type of nigga that's built to last
If you fuck with me I'll put my foot in your ass
See, I don't give a fuck, 'cause I keep bailin' Yo, what the fuck are they yellin'?

[Chorus: MC Ren + Sample]

Gangsta, Gangsta! That's what they're yellin'
It's not about a salary, it's all about reality
Gangsta, Gangsta!

Hopin' you sophisticated motherfuckers
Hear what I have to say

The overarching theme of the police is present. A scene in which the police is chasing (an) African American(s) is described.

He hints at the fact that he was once in prison.
[Verse 2: Ice Cube]
When me and my posse stepped in the house
All the punk-ass niggas start breakin' out
'Cause you know, they know what's up
So we started lookin' for the bitches with the big butts
Like her, but she keep cryin'
"I got a boyfriend"—bitch, stop lyin'!
Dumb-ass hooker ain't nothin' but a dyke
Suddenly I see some niggas that I don't like
Walked over to 'em, and said, "What's up?"
The first nigga that I saw, hit him in the jaw
Ren started stompin' him, and so did E
By that time got rushed by security
Out the door, but we don't quit
Ren said: "Let's start some shit"
I got a shotgun, and here's the plot
Takin' niggas out with a flurry of buck shots
Boom, boom, boom! Yeah, I was gunnin'
And then you look, all you see is niggas runnin'
And fallin' and yellin' and pushin' and screamin'
And cussin', I stepped back and I kept bustin'
And then I realized it's time for me to go
So I stopped, jumped in the vehicle
It's like this, because of that who-ride
N.W.A is wanted for a homicide
'Cause I'm the type of nigga that's built to last
Fuck with me, I'll put my foot in your ass
See, I don't give a fuck, 'cause I keep bailin'
Yo, what the fuck are they yellin'?

[Chorus: MC Ren + Sample]
Gangsta, Gangsta! That's what they're yellin'
It's not about a salary, it's all about reality
Gangsta, Gangsta
He'll tell you exactly how he feel
And don't hold a fuckin' thing back

[Verse 3: Ice Cube]
Homies all standin' around, just hangin'
Some dope-dealin', some gang-bangin'
We decide to roll and we deep
See a nigga on Dayton's and we creep
Real slow and before you know
I had my shotgun pointed in the window
He got scared and hit the gas
Right then I knew I has to smoke his ass
He kept rollin', I jumped in the bucket
We couldn't catch him, so I said fuck it
Then we headed right back to the fort
Sweatin' all the bitches in the biker shorts
We didn't get no play from the ladies
With six niggas in a car—are you crazy?
She was scared, and it was showin'
We all said "Fuck you, bitch!" and kept goin'

Crime, perhaps black-on-black violence.

Drug and gang problems.
To the hood, and we was fin to
Find somethin' else to get into
Like some pussy, or in fact
A bum rush, but we call it rat pack
On a nigga for nothin' at all
Ice Cube'll go stupid when I'm full of eight ball
I might stumble, but still won't lose
Now I'm dressed in the county blues
'Cause I'm the type of nigga that's built to last
If you fuck with me, I'll put my foot in your ass
I don't give a fuck, 'cause I keep bailin'
Yo, what the fuck are they yellin'?

[Interlude: Dr. Dre + MC Ren (The Jimmy Castor Bunch)]
Wait a minute, wait a minute, cut this shit!
Man, what'cha gon' do now?
(What we're gonna do right here is go way back)
How far you goin' back? (Way back)
"As we go a lil' somethin' like this"—hit it!

[Pre-Verse: Ice Cube]
Here's a little gangsta, short in size
A t-shirt and Levi's is his only disguise
Built like a tank, yet hard to hit
Ice Cube and Eazy-E cold runnin' shit

[Verse 4: Eazy-E]
Well, I'm Eazy-E, the one they're talkin' about
Nigga tried to roll the dice and just crapped out
Police tried to roll, so it's time to go
I creeped away real slow and jumped in the six-
With the {diamond in the back, sun-roof top}
Diggin' the scene with the gangsta lean
'Cause I'm the E, I don't slang or bang
I just smoke motherfuckers like it ain't no thang
And all you bitches, you know I'm talkin' to you
"We want to fuck you, Eazy," I want to fuck you too
Because you see, I don’t really take no shit
So let me tell you motherfuckers who you're fuckin' with
'Cause I'm the type of nigga that's built to last
If you fuck with me, I'll put a foot in your ass
I don't give a fuck, 'cause I keep bailin'
Yo, what the fuck are they yellin'?

[Chorus: MC Ren + Sample]
Gangsta, Gangsta! That's what they're yellin'
It's not about a salary, it's all about reality
Gangsta, Gangsta
He'll fuck up you and yours
And anything that gets in his way
Gangsta, Gangsta! That's what they're yellin'
It's not about a salary, it's all about reality
Gangsta, Gangsta
He'll just call you a low-life motherfucker
And talk about yo' funky ways

4. If It Ain't Ruff

[Intro]
Ain't that kinda shit you can sweep under no rug, you know?

[Verse 1: MC Ren]
Ren is the villain and you're just an hostage
So whenever I'm steppin' cover your head like an ostrich
Groupies been waitin' for this, suckers been hatin' for this
You know why? Because so many are relatin' to this
Jealous is how they feel it intentionally
But they start to love it because I made it eventually
Pumpin' the music I keep the music like pumpin'
Cause Ren ain't in here for nothin', I keep the average crowd jumpin'
Yo, you know the color, the villain's in black
Always down to make noise, and attack
So you better get back unless you wanna come with it
And make your face like a target and close your eyes when I hit it
You're screamin' with fear but it's with fear that you're screamin'
You're wakin up in a sweat cause Ren is givin'
bad dreams and I'm not schemin', I'm just tellin the facts
That's how it is when N.W.A. starts to jack
So brothers that wanna scrap with me
That sweezin' and sneezin' will have to lap with me
Especially beggin' to write some lyrics with me
I just snatch your girl to take a nap with me
Cause when it comes to Ren there's no comparison
And if you try to be me, it's quite embarrassin'
But I understand cause you're mentally slow
Cause I can tell from the jump you're too nervous to go

[Hook]
If it ain't ruff, it ain't me
The gangsta's black and he's about to attack
If it ain't ruff, it ain't me
Lemme bust a freestyle there - (Alright bet)
[Verse 2: MC Ren]
I can tell that you're afraid to fight me
Simple because you lost the crowd and they had
to invite me
Because your sweat is a puddle but there's a
puddle o' sweat
I'm a threat, so get a cold rag and wipe your
neck
And clean the dirt off your face that causes acne
It's ridiculous thinkin' that you can jack me
This is the round where the punch will go
Into your H-E-A-D; that's known as a blow
I'm makin a point but it's a point that I'm makin
Like, see, I'm hatin' the fakin' I keep the suckers
like shakin'
Scared to speak with a thought when they're
chosen
The sound of my voice in their ear and they're
frozen
This is a battle to the death, it's like the same ol'
Against a brother on a tip, with a Kangol
Givin' a pain but it's with pain that I'm givin'
But I'm comparin' and tearin' em but I'm makin
a livin'
With the hype of a nine volt battery
And the odds for me to conquer is averagely
good
Meanin' I'mma flow
I'm from the streets so, yo, I'm ready to go

[Hook]
If it ain't ruff, it ain't me (Yo Ren)
The gangsta's black and he's about to attack
If it ain't ruff, it ain't me
Man whatcha gonna do now? - *Get funky*

[Verse 3: MC Ren]
The 'do not disturb' sign is in effect
While I'm thinkin of a fool to select
To give the victim the verdict so for the verdict
a victim
Slammin' my vocals on a dance with the rest
then I kick them
Tell 'em they're guilty, and peep out the bailer
And get a new track o' drums so I can play with
Percussion, pumpin' it loud when I perform
Yo, you wanna play in my game, put on a
uniform
It ain't a rule in the book you have to go by
Hey, cause when it comes to cheatin', yo, you
should know I
For fear in the hearts cause it's the hearts full of fear

This statement relates to the fact that black people are prosecuted for no reason, even when they are innocent.
Coz what you hear in your ear is something funky and clear
The Hulk was incredible yo but Ren he was super
But now I'm ruthless, a civilian and not a trooper
But a soldier with a top rankin
Givin' dope material, the hell with the gankin'
So play like an airplane and just jet
And keep your blood pressure low cause I'm a threat, if not
I'm afraid of the show
That you're a sucker and you're too nervous to go

[Hook]
If it ain't ruff, it ain't me (Yo Ren)
The gangsta's black and he's about to attack
If it ain't ruff, it ain't me (Yo Ren)
The gangsta's black
If it ain't ruff, it ain't me
The gangsta's black and he's about to attack
If it ain't ruff, it ain't me (Yo Ren)
The gangsta's black
If it ain't ruff, it ain't me
The gangsta's black and he's about to attack
If it ain't ruff, it ain't me (Yo Ren)
The gangsta's black
If it ain't ruff, it ain't me

5. Parental Discretion Iz Advised
One, two, three, kick it

[Intro: The D.O.C.]
Aiyyo Dre, what's goin on man? What's goin on?
Ay what ch'all gonna do for this last record?
Nah tell me what cha'all gonna do?
Okay, you want me to do the intro? Aight!

[Verse 1: The D.O.C.]
Parental discretion is advised for the moment
While I'm getting candid, now understand it
Ain't too typical in any way, though the pro
On the mic is the D.O. to the C., this is an intro
I know The D.O.C. makes you want to take a Valium
So buy a bucket cause upcoming is my album
And for the record, meaning my record, check it
Listen to the single and you'll be like, yo, I gotta get it

He is telling the truth.
But in the meantime, listen to the rhyme
Of the Dr. Dre played with N.W.A
Yella's on the drum roll, rocking the beat
Aiyyo Dre, where's you gonna take this shit man?

[Verse 2: Dr. Dre]
Aiyyo, let's take it to the street (WORD UP!)
Let 'em understand perfection
Let knowledge be the tool for suckers to stop guessing
Cause I don't give a fuck about radio play

Observe the English I display
Lyrics for the adults, children have been barred
And scarred from listening to something so motherfucking HARD
Dope, pumping that's so my shit will never falter
Yo it's Dre so fuck the "Mind of Minolta"
Psycho like no other motherfucker
So step to me wrong, G-O for what you N-O
But be warned, never will I leave like a regular
Cause I'm a little better than the regular competitor
I use to see 'em on stage
Earning money like a thief, but without a gauge
Until I got full, of clocking the lame getting pull
(They said you wasn't gon' get paid)
Nah that's bullshit! They like it stylistic
And I enchant the crowd like I'm a mystic
(C-C-C-C) C-C-C-cameras are flashing when
I'm in action
A photo, or fresh with a flair for fashion
Pure simplicity -- see, it's elementary
You hear one of the hardest motherfuckers this century
Try to comprise a word to the wise and the guys
Parental discretion is advised

[Verse 3: MC Ren]
Ren is most extremely high performance
The black hat cause I worn this, cause it's like enormous
Some shit I don't take it, not even in a toilet
And shit from a sucker, put in a pot and I'll boil it
Turn up the pilot as it burns
And maybe the motherfuckers will learn
I'm not a sub, cause I speak sensible
Not considered a prince, cause I'm a principal
I'm engineering the shit that you're hearing
Cause when it comes to power, I'm power steering
Silly you say, I say you're silly when you say it
Rushing to the eject, to put my shit in and play it

Read: observe the explicit language I display.

He suggests the hat is black because it was worn by a black man.
It's like Apollo, but I'm not an amateur
And I'm not giving a fuck while I'm damaging ya
It's for the record; so Ren's lyrics is gonna spin it
And if there was a trophy involved, I'd win it
Possession is mine and I'm the holder
Cause a nigga like Ren don't give a fuck cause I'm older
So for you to step off would be wise
And say fuck it, parental discretion is advised

[Verse 4: Ice Cube]
I be what is known as a bandit
You gotta hand it to me when you truly understand it
Cause if you fail to see, read it in Braille
It'll still be funky -- so what's next is the flex
Of a genius, my rapid-stutter-stepping if you seen this
Dope, you hope that I don't really mean this
But if Play made a greater high-top fade
It's not my trademark when I get loose in the dark
You guess it was a test of a different style
It's just another motherfucker on the pile
Driving your ass with the flow of the tongue
You hung yourself shortly after knowledge was brung
To your attention, by the hardest motherfucking artist
That is known for lynching any sucker in a minute
Stagger 'em all
When I start flowing like Niagara Falls
Ice Cube is equipped to rip shit in a battle
Move like a snake when I'm mad; and then my tail rattle
I get low on the flow so let your kids know
When I bust, parental discretion is a must

[Verse 5: Eazy-E]
Little did they know that I would be arriving
And it's surprising, rocking it from where I been
But it's the E here to take, no mistake to be made
In the trade where funky ass records are being played
Fuck the regular, yo as I get better the Bitches wanna trick and go stupid up on the dick
So I get 'em hot, thinking they're gonna get it
As they sit, rubbing their legs like a cricket
To you it may be funny, but
There's no service of beef without money

Eazy-E asserts that it is special that he has made it this far in life considering where he was born: Compton.
So slip the C-note, and you can choke
On a wing-ding-ling-a-ling down your throat
Foreplay to me ain't shit
When you spread 'em I'm ready, then you can
get the dick
Of the Eaz, if you can deal with the size
But if you can't, parental discretion's advised!

[Outro]
Shut the fuck up!

6. 8 Ball (remix)

"Kick that shit!" -] Flavor Flav
{*scratched*} "City of Compton!"
{*scratched*} "City of Compton!" {*echoes*}

Cold kickin ass {*scratch*} cold kickin ass
{*scratch*}
Cold kickin ass {*scratch*} "Kick that shit!"

"Pull up a chair.." -] Rakim {*echoes*}

[Verse One: Eazy-E]
I don't drink brass monkey, like the beat funky
Nickname Eazy-E yo' 8 ball junkie
Bass drum kickin, to show my shit
Rappin holdin my dick boy, I don't quit
Crowd rockin motherfucker from around the way
I got a six-shooter, yo' mean hombre'
Rollin through the hood, to find the boys
To kick dust and cuss, crank up some noise
Police on my drawers, I have to pause
40 ounce in my lap and it's freezin my balls
I hook a right turn and let the boys go past
Then I say to myself, "They can kiss my ass!"
Hip to get drunk got the 8 in my lips
Put in the old tape Marvin Gaye's greatest hits
Turn the shit up had the bass cold whompin
Cruisin through the Eastside, South of Compton
See a big ass, and I say word
I took a look at the face, and the bitch was to the curb
Hoes on my tip for the title I'm holdin
Eazy-E's fucked up and got the 8 ball rollin

I, was.. "Cold kickin ass"
I, was.. "Raised in L.A."
I, was.. "Cruisin down the street in my six-fo" -]
Eazy
{"Too, much, posse!" -] Flavor Flav}

[Verse Two: Eazy-E]
Ridin on Slausson lookin for Crenshaw
Turned down the sound, to ditch the law
Stopped at a light and had a fit
Cause a Mexican almost wrecked my shit
Flipped his ass off, put it to the floor
Bottle was empty so I went to the store
Nigga on tilt cause I was drunk
See a sissy-ass punk, had to go in my trunk
Reached inside cause it's like that
Came back out with a silver gat
Fired at the punk, and it was all because
I had to show the nigga what time it was
Pulled out the jammy and like a mirage
A sissy like that got out of Dodge
Sucka on me cause the title I'm holdin
Eazy-E's fucked up and got the 8 ball rollin
"Fuck it up y'all!!" -] repeat 6X
"YEAH!!!", *guitar riff* -] Beastie Boys

[Verse Three: Eazy-E]
Olde English 800 cause that's my brand
Take it in a bottle, 40, quart, or can
Drink it like a madman, yes I do
Fuck the police and a 502
Stepped in the party, I was drunk as hell
Three bitches already said, "Eric yo' breath smells!"
40 ounce in hand, that's what I got
"Yo man you see Eazy hurling in the parkin lot?"
Stepped on your foot, cold dissed yo' ho
Asked her to dance and she said
"Hell no!"
Called her a bitch cause that's the rule
"Bitch, who you callin a bitch?!"
Boys in the hood tryin to keep me cool
You tell my homeboy you wanna kick my butt
I walked in your face and we get 'em up
I start droppin the dogs, and watch you fold
Just dumb full of cum, got knocked out cold
"Made you look sick you snotty-nosed prick!
Now your fly bitch is all over his Dick!"
Punk got dropped cause the title I'm holdin
Eazy-E's fucked up and got the 8 ball rollin
"Stomp a mudhole in your ass!" -] Flavor Flav
"Stomp a mudhole in your ass, BITCH!" -] Flav

[Verse Four: Eazy-E]
Pass the brew motherfucker while I tear shit up
And y'all listen up close to roll call
Eazy-E's in the place I got money and juice
Rendezvous with me and we make the deuce

This is once again a statement against the police.

Alcohol.

Relating to weapons.

Alcohol.

"Fuck the police" is the overall statement the artists want to make with this album. “502” is the legal code for driving under the influence.

Alcohol.

Eazy-E is under the influence of drugs.
Dre makes the beats so god damn funky
Do the Olde 8, fuck the brass monkey
Ice Cube writes the rhymes, that I say
Hail to the niggas from C.I.A
Krazy D is down and in effect
We make hardcore jams, so fuck respect
Make a toast punky-punk to the title I'm holdin
Eazy-E's fucked up and got the 8 ball rollin

{[*scratched*] } "City of Compton!"
{[*scratched*] } "City of Compton!" {[*echoes*]}

{[*scratched*] } "City of Compton!" {[*scratched to end*]}

Cocaine.

Eazy-E is under the influence of drugs.

Once again a reminder that we are in Compton
and that the artists are from Compton.

7. Something Like That

[Dr. Dre]
Ah yeah, yo Ren, yo ready to do this shit ?

[Ren]
Yeah, Dre, let's rip shit up

[Dre]
Hey, yo Yella Boy, why don't you kick me one
of them
Funky ass beats ?

[Ren]
Yo, we got my homeboy Eazy E in the house

[Dre]
Compton's definitely in the house. Yo Ren,
whatta we gonna
Call this ? Tell'em what yo name is ?

[Ren]
Yeah something like that

[Dre]
Allright, let's kick this shit on the one
Kick it

[Verse 1: MC Ren & Dr. Dre]
Back by demand, now it's big as fuck
Because you as the public, you should know
what's up

"Compton's in the House" was more than gold,
it was a hit
Cause it was based on some crazy shit
So our final conclusion has been permitted
Punks made us a target and knew that we'd hit it
But that was a part of showbizz

[Dr. Dre]
Hey yo homeboy, why don't you tell'em what
your name is

[Verse 2: MC Ren]

They are representing Compton.

They are representing Compton.
Well for the record it's Ren, and for the street it's villain
And strapped with a gat, it's more like Matt Dillon
On "Gunsmoke", but not a man of the law
I'm just the baddest motherfucker that you ever saw
See, I peep and then I creep on a fool
Get my bloodpressure high but still stay cool
Dig a grave of a nigga lookin' up to me
That really had the nerve that he could fuck with me
Who was the man in the mass, while I was waitin' to axe
You know, it's MC Ren kickin' mucho ass
Gettin' respect in showbizz
Hey yo homeboy
[Dre:]
Whassup?
Why don't you tell'em what yo name is?

[Verse 3: Dr. Dre]
Dre, the motherfuckin' doctor, bitch hopper
The sucker-motherfucker stopper
Back with a vocal track that's a fresh one
So now, let's get the motherfuckin' session
Goin', flowin'. It's time to start throwin' - rhymes
So keep in mind all the suckers I'm blowin'
Cause I'm a start showin' the time
Never sayin' I'm the best and just goin' for mine
Unlike a lotta suckers who claim they're gettin' busy
When their records only make good frisbees
You need to quit runnin' off the mouth
Stop and think before you put some whack bullshit out
It's not difficult, in fact it's kinda simple
To create something funky that's original
You either talkin' 'bout the place to be
Who you are, what you got, or about a sucker MC

[Dre]
Oh yeah, that's what I'm talkin' about, Ren
You know what I'm sayin'?
[Ren]
Yeah, I know what you're sayin', Dre, but you
Still ain't told'em enough, man
[Dre]
Allright, Allright
Well, let's kick one more verse right here, allright
Kick it

[Verse 4: MC Ren & Dr. Dre]
This is portable, something to fuck with yo ear
Ren and Dre will appear when the sound is clear
To fuck it up like we always do, and that's the
trick
Sayin' some shit to make the bitches wanna suck
our dicks
But it's an everyday thang
Communicating to y'all with the Compton slang
Compton's back in the house and your
appartment
So open your door, by the way, so we can start
it
Cause the way we feel, we're gonna fuck it up
tonight
I got my mic in my hand, with a hell of a grip
Bitches screamin' and shit, now it's a trip
Waitin' for the grand finale, or the end
Or stupid rhymes set by Dre and Ren
Well, like a kid, we get new shoes and go faster
Smilin', like hell, as we move past the
Suckers, the motherfuckers with the ego hype
Well we're positive and they're on a negative
type
And if think we're about to quit...
Motherfucker you ain't heard shit

[Dre]
Yeah, that shit was funky, you know what I'm
sayin', Ren ?

[Ren]
I know what you're sayin', this is MC Ren and
Dr.Dre
Cold kickin' it in the place

[Dre]
Ah yeah, my mellow Eazy E in the house
Yella Boy in the house
My boy Ice Cube
Arabian Prince cold rockin' shit

[Ren]
Oh yeah, hey, I'm a say whassup to my
homeboys from CMW

[Dre]
Yeah, hey, yo Ren, whatta we gonna call this
shit?
"Tell'em what yo name is?"

[Ren]
Yeah something like that...

They state that they are talking/rapping to the
listener with their Compton knowledge and
language.

8. Express Yourself

[Intro]
Dr. Dre: Yo, man, it's a lot of brothers out there
flakin' and perpetratin' but scared to kick reality

The introduction comments on the fact that
people are sometimes afraid to face the truth.
Ice Cube: Man, you've been doin' all this dope producing, but you ain't had a chance to show 'em what time it is

Dr. Dre: So what you want me to do? ...
(Express yourself)

[Verse 1: Dr. Dre]
I'm expressing with my full capabilities
And now I'm living in correctional facilities
Cause some don't agree with how I do this
I get straight, meditate like a Buddhist
I'm dropping flavor, my behavior is hereditary
But my technique is very necessary
Blame it on Ice Cube, because he says it gets
funky
When you got a subject and a predicate
Add it on a dope beat and that'll make you think
Some suckers just tickle me pink
To my stomach, cause they don't flow like this
You know what? I won't hesitate to dis one
Or two before I'm through, so don't try to sing
this
Some drop science, well I'm dropping English
Even if Yella makes it a cappella
I still express, yo I don't smoke weed or sess
Cause it's known to give a brother brain damage
And brain damage on the mic don't manage
nothing
But making a sucker and you equal, don't be
another sequel

[Hook]
Express yourself
Come on and do it

[Verse 2: Dr. Dre]
Now, getting back to the PG
That's program, and it's easy
Dre is back, new jacks are made hollow
Expressing ain't their subject because they like
that's for them
The words, the style, the trend, the records I
spin
Again and again and again, yo, you on the other end
Watch a brother saying dope rhymes with no help
There's no fessing and guessing while I'm expressing myself
It's crazy to see people be
What society wants them to be, but not me
Ruthless is the way to go, they know
Others say rhymes that fail to be original
Or they kill where the hip-hop starts

The answer to the taboo on the truth according to N.W.A. is to express yourself.

Dr. Dre talks about how he is locked up in jail because some people in society do not agree with his way of life.

He does not do marijuana.

He asserts that it is unbelievable that people want to conform to society’s norms. He does not want to do this.
Forget about the ghetto and rap for the pop charts
Some musicians cuss at home
But scared to use profanity when up on the microphone
Yeah, they want reality but you won't hear none
They rather exaggerate a little fiction
Some say no to drugs and take a stand
But after the show they go looking for the dopeman
Or they ban my group from the radio, hear N.W.A and say "Hell no!"
But you know it ain't all about wealth as long as you make a note to...  

[Hook]
Express yourself
Come on and do it

[Verse 3: Dr. Dre]
From the heart cause if you wanna start to move up the chart
Then expression is a big part of it
You ain't efficient when you flow
You ain't swift, moving like a tortoise, full of rigor mortis
There's a little bit more to show
I got rhymes in my mind, embedded like an embryo
Or a lesson, all of ’em expression
And if you start fessing, I got a Smith and Wesson for you
I might ignore your record because it has no bottom
I get loose in the summer, winter, spring and autumn
It's Dre on the mic, getting physical
Doing the job, N.W.A is the lynch mob
Yes, I'm macabre but you know you need this
And the knowledge is growing, just like a fetus
Or a tumor but here's the rumor
Dre is in the neighborhood and he's up to no good
When I start expressing myself, Yella slam it
Cause If I stay funky like this, I'm doing damage
Or I'mma be too hyped and need a straight jacket
I got knowledge and other suckers lack it
So, when you see Dre, a DJ on the mic
Ask what it's like, it's like we getting hype tonight
Cause if I strike, it ain't for your good health
But I won't strike if you just

Commentary on how a lot of hip hop is made for the purpose of making money and how this makes the political purpose of it go to waste.

Commentary on the hypocrisy of hip hop artists.

Statement on the fact that hip hop is worth more than money as long as you make use of its power: expressing yourself.
[Hook]
Express yourself
Come on and do it

9. Compton’s N the House
[Intro: Dr. Dre + MC Ren]
Yeah, right about now Compton’s in the mothafucking house
Yeah do it, do it, do it
N.W.A’s in full effect
Hey yo Yella boy, kick me that funky-ass beat
Compton’s definitely in the house
Pump it up, pump it up
Yeah, who's in the mothafucking house right now?
Yeah, Compton’s definitely in the house
Hey yo Ren, what we’re gonna do?
Pump that shit up
Yeah, Compton’s definitely in the house

[Verse 1: MC Ren & Dr. Dre + Eazy-E]
To the people over here
To the people over there
To the people, the people, people, the people, the people, people
From everywhere watching the show
Payin’ top dollar because they know
When we’re on the stage, we’re in a mothafuckin’ range

[R] So Dre
[D] What up?

[R] Why don't you get the 12 guage
And show 'em how Eazy-Duz-It
So if you punks wanna make somethin' of it
Step up, run up, get up, what’s up sucker
You want some of this?
Then you're a stupid mothafucka
Kickin’ - like the kick from a kickdrum
Yella boy on the drum gettin’ dumb
Programmin’ - a beat that's hittin’
And if you listen then you know we're not bullshittin’

[Verse 2: MC Ren]
Dope - like a pound or a key
So shut the fuck up and listen to me
I make a killin’
I got money to the ceilin’ (why’s that?)
Cuz I'm a mothafuckin' ruthless villain
MC Ren - stomping any fool in my way
With some help from my homeboy Dre

[Verse 3: Dr. Dre + MC Ren]
Now my name is Dre - de mothafuckin' doctor
Rippin’ shit up, oh yeah, and here to rock ya
With some help from my homeboy E

N.W.A. are representatives of Compton.
N.W.A. is here.
A weapon.
The criminal of the ruthless posse
Fuckin' it up, word up, is what we do
The reputation of the NWA crew
Gettin' busy because we're cold stompin'
And we're born and raised
And we're born and raised in Compton

[Verse 4: MC Ren & Dr. Dre]
[R] Speaking of Compton, it's making me sick (why?)
Everybody's talking that crazy shit
[D] Saying they were raised in the CPT (aha)
Just as I was, they try to be like me
[R & D] Popping that shit, get the fuck out my face
Knowing that they never even seen the place
Claiming my city is my city they claim
Muthafucka we're about to put some salt in your game

[Break: Dr. Dre + MC Ren]
Yeah I'm tired of these mothafuckers running around town
Talking about they're from Compton and shit
Trying to get on the bandwagon...
Yeah Dre, I know what you're saying man
But let's tell them who we're talking about

[Verse 6: Dr. Dre & MC Ren]
What do you call a crew that can rap like that?
[R] Yo N.W.A call them mothafuckers wack
[D] Yeah you know what time it is, listen to why we call them wack
They got a wacky wack record with a wacky wack crew

[R] Yo what about the lyrics?
[D] That shit's wacky wack too
[R] With a fucked up style and a fucked up show

[D] Hey yo Ren, what about the scratching, is it def?
[R] Fuck no!
The mothafucking record is so mothafucking wack
The mothafucking cracka jack needs to step the fuck back

[Break: Dr. Dre + MC Ren]
Do you want some of this? Hell no
Dre the mothafuckin' doctor
Well for the record it's Ren and for the street it's Villain
Dre the mothafuckin' doctor

N.W.A. is known for being from Compton. This makes their raps true.

Commentary on the fact that people are using Compton to make money. They do not know what it is really like.

His name is Ren, but he is seen as the enemy in the streets.
Well for the record it’s Ren and for the street it’s Villain.

Yella boy, why don’t you kick me one of them funky-ass beats?

My boy, my boy, my boy Ice Cube

Yo we got my homeboy Eazy E in the house

Won’t you tell ‘em what your name is?

[Verse 7: MC Ren]

MC Ren is the mothafucking coroner

I’m getting rid of mothafuckas as if they was a foreigner

Show no grief to pretend when I sin

I punch you can block it but I’m still get in

This ain’t a TKO in the first

But it’s some shit from a nigga in black it’s much worse

Than a beat from Tyson cause Ren is not nice

and

Your ass is better off just rolling a dice and

Finding you a number for luck

Cause you all need it when you see I don’t give a fuck

My identity, and the shit is getting shown

Without a video I’m still getting on

I’m at a show then my picture is taken

One click of the flash and punk niggas are breakin’

To the door, tryin’ to join my fan club

Lip-syncin’ over one of my dubs

The instrumental will scratch for the moment

Until I fuck up the so called opponent

That’s standing in the zone of the twilight

Saying how in the fuck did he get mixed up in my fight

It wasn’t a mistake, it was a set-up

So until I’m finished poppin’ my lyrics you should shut up

And don’t attempt to speak

Because it’s bad enough you rollin’ up shit creek

With a nigga like Ren about the hit

Now let me hear you mothafuckas talk some more shit

I’m a bust your ass in your mouth

Yo, unless you’re saying, “Compton’s in the house”

[Verse 8: Dr. Dre + Eazy-E]

Who realy cares - about a sucker on a take off

Bust a move, we can have a shake and bake-off

Me and you can go cause I don’t care yo

Rap fight or guerilla warfare

We can rumble, cause when my lungs go in and out

I kick rhymes in a bundle to win a bout.

His name is Ren, but he is seen as the enemy in the streets.

In a sense, African Americans are gotten rid of as if they are foreigners.

Any crime or act is worsened by society and the police when it is done by a black person.

N.W.A. is really from Compton as opposed to the “imposters” in this song.
Or scurry or scuffle
I just muffle the opposition, there's no competition
Let them know that Dre is getting stronger
**Compton's in the house** but now it's some' longer
I won't get set-up, shut up, I'm kinda fed up
You can say uncle and I still won't let up
Cause Dre is the mothafucking doctor
And if me and Ren's on the mic, it's like
propaganda no doubt
Boy you should've known by now

**[Outro: Dr. Dre]**
Yeah, it's time to put Compton on the map
Don't ever think you can get it on, you stupid mothafuckas!

N.W.A. is really from Compton as opposed to the “imposters” in this song.

They believe it is time for Compton (and perhaps everything that goes on there) to be known publicly.

---

10. I Ain't Tha 1

**[Intro: Woman #1 and Ice Cube]**
Ice Cube, do you think you could give me some money to get my hair done?
What's wrong with your hair right now?
Well you know I get it done every week, and I need my nails done too
Look, I'mma tell you like this

**[Verse 1: Ice Cube]**
I ain't the one, the one to get played like a pooh butt
See I'm from the street, so I know what's up
On these silly games that's played by the women
I'm only happy when I'm goin up in em
But you know, I'm a menace to society
But girls in biker shorts are so fly to me
So I step to em, with aggression
Listen to the kid, and learn a lesson today
See they think we narrow minded
Cause they got a cute face, and big-behinded
So I walk over and say "How ya doin'?"
See I'm only down for screwin', but you know
Ya gotta play it off cool
Cause if they catch you slipping, you'll get schooled
And they'll get you for your money, son
Next thing you know you're getting their hair and they nails done
Fool, and they'll let you show em off
But when it comes to sex, they got a bad cough
Or a headache, it's all give
And no take
Run out of money, and watch your heart break
They'll drop you like a bad habit

Ice Cube is from the streets (i.e. the ghetto), so he is aware of everything that happens.
Cause a brother with money yo, they gotta have it
Messing with me though, they gets none
You can't juice Ice Cube girl, cause I ain't the one

[Interlude #1: Woman #2 and Woman #1]
Girrrrl, you got to get these brothers for all the money you can honey. Cause if they ain't got no money, they can't do nothin for me but get out of my face.
I know what you mean, girl; it ain't nothin right jumpin off unless he got dollars!

[Verse 2: Ice Cube]
Sometimes I used to wonder
How the hell an ugly dude get a fine girl's number
He's getting juiced for his ducats
I tell a girl in a minute yo, I drive a bucket
And won't think nutting of it
She can ride or walk, either leave it or love it
I show her that I'm not the O, the N-E, say
I'm a ruthless N-I double-G A
Cause I'm gamin on a female that's gamin on me
You know I spell girl with a B
A brother like me is only out for one thing
I think with my ding-a-ling, but I won't bring no Flowers to your doorstep, when we goin out
Cause you'll take it for granted, no doubt
And after the date, I'mma want to do the wild thing
You want lobster, huh? I'm thinking Burger King
And when I take you, you get frustrated
You can't juice Ice Cube and you hate it
But you see, I don't go nuts
Over girls like you with the BIG ol butts
It start comin out the pocket, to knock it
But when the damage is done
You can only lay me girl, you can't play me girl
For the simple fact that, I ain't the one

[Interlude #2: Woman #2 and Woman #1]
I don't care how they look; if they got money, we can hook up but they ain't gettin none.
Yeah I just make em think they gonna get some, play with they mind a lil bit, and get that money.
Oh Ice Cube, can I have some money pleeeease?

[Verse 3]
Give you money? Why bother?
Cause you know I'm looking nothing like your father

The N-word is considered incredibly disrespectful. It is, however, “accepted” by the black community if it is uttered by a black person.
Girl, I can't be played or ganked
Ganked means getting took for your bank
Or your gold or your money or something
Nine times outta ten, she's giving up nothing
They get mad when I put it in perspective
But let's see if my knowledge is effective
To the brothas man they robbing you blind
Cause they fine with a big behind, but pay it no mind
Keep your money to yourself homie
And if you got enough game
You'll get her name and her number
Without going under
You can't leave em and love and stay above em
I used to get no play now she stay behind me
Cause I said I had a Benz 190
But I lied and played the one
Just to get some now she feels dumb
To my homies it's funny
But that's what you get trying to play me for my money
Now don't you feel used?
But I don't give a hoot, huh, because I knock boots
You shouldn't be, so damn material
And try to milk Ice Cube like cereal
Now how many times do I have to say it?
Cause if I have to go get a gun
You girls will learn I don't burn
You think I'm a sucka, but I ain't the one

[Outro: Woman #1 and Ice Cube]
But you said you love me!
I don't see no rings on this finger
Why you doin me like this? I love you!
Yeah, you love my money; I got what I wanted - - beat it!

11. Dopeman

[Introduction: Eazy-E and unknown
Dopefiend]

[Dopefiend] *knocking on the door*
[Eazy-E] Yo man what you need?
[Dopefiend] Yo, uh, man I need something
man, I need a twenty, man
[Eazy-E] Whatchu got, man?
[Dopefiend] Ey, I got this rope chain, man
[Eazy-E] Man, this shit look like a gold on the roll shit (What the fuck is that?)
(It's a fuckin dud!)
[Dopefiend] It's real man
[Eazy-E] This shit ain't real
(That nigga sellin' that shit again, man?!)
[Eazy-E] Get the fuck outta here and come back with some money

[Dopefiend] C'mon man, be cool man

[Eazy-E] Y'all Mexicans always comin' with this shit

[Verse 1: Ice Cube]

It was once said by a man who couldn't quit "Dopeman, please can I have another hit?"
The dope man said, "Clucka, I don't give a shit
If your girl kneel down and sucked my dick"
It all happened and the guy tried to choke her
Nigga didn't care, she ain't nothing but a smoker
That's the way it goes, that's the name of the game

Young brother getting over by slanging 'caine
Gold around his neck in 14 k heaven
Bitches jocking on his dick 24-7

Plus he's making money keeping the base heads waiting
Rollin' six four with the fresh ass daytons

Living in Compton, California CA
His uzi up yo ass if he don't get paid
Nigga begging for credit, he's knocking out teeth
Clocking much dollars on the 1st and 15th
Big wad of money, nothing less than a twenty
Yo, you want a five-oh? The dope man's got plenty

To be a dope man, boy, you must qualify
Don't get high off your own supply
From a key to a g it's all about money
10 piece for 10 base, pipe comes free
And people out there are not hip to the fact
If you see somebody getting money for crack, he's the

[Hook]

Dopeman, dopeman!
Hey man give me a hit
Dopeman, dopeman!
Yo man fuck that shit
Dopeman, dopeman!
We just can't quit
Dopeman, dopeman!
Well, suck this bitch!

[Interlude: Dr. Dre]

Wait a minute -- who the fuck are you talking to?
Do you know who the fuck I am?
Man, I can't believe this shit -- this bitch is trying to gank me
I'll slap you up side your head with nine inches of limp dick!

Cannot stop doing drugs.
Urban slang for drug dealer.
Urban slang for fool.

Someone who smokes drugs.
Cocaine.
Addicts.

This tells the listener that what happens in the song is what happens in Compton.

Urban slang for police.

To provide someone with drugs.
They are addicted to drugs.
[Verse 2: Ice Cube]
You need a nigga with money so you get a
dopeman
Juice that fool for as much as you can
She likes his car and he gets with her
Got a black eye cause the dopeman hit her
Let that slide and you pay it no mind
Find that he's slapping you all the time
But that's okay, cause he's so rich
And you ain't nothing but a dopeman's bitch!
Do what he say and you keep your mouth shut
Popping that trash might get you fucked up
You'll sit and cry if the dope man strikes you
He don't give a fuck - he got two just like you
There's a another girl in the dopeman's life
Not quite a bitch but far from a wife
Sh'es called the strawberry and everybody know
Strawberry, strawberry is the neighborhood ho
Do anything for a hit or two
Give tha bitch a rock, she'll fuck the whole
damn crew
It might be your wife and it might make you
sick
Come home and see her mouth on the
dopeman's dick
Strawberry just look and you'll see her
But don't fuck around or she'll give you
gonorrhea
And people out there are not hip to the fact
That Strawberry is a girl selling pussy for crack

to the

[Hook 2]
Dopeman, dopeman!
Hey man give me a hit
Dopeman, dopeman!
Hey yo man fuck that shit
Dopeman, dopeman!
In yo face
Yo Dre, kick in tha bass

[Verse 3: Ice Cube]
If you smoke 'caine, you're a stupid
motherfucker
Known around the hood as the schoolyard
clucker
Doing that crack with all the money you got
On your hands and knees searching for a piece
of rock
Jonesing for a hit and you're looking for more
Done stole a Alpine of out Eazy's 6-4
You need your ass whooped cause it's out of this
earth
Can't get a 10 piece need a dolla fifty's worth

People are even selling their bodies for drugs.

Cocaine.

Drugs.
Knucklehead nigga, yeah, you turned into a crook
But swear up and down, boy, that you ain't hooked
You beat your friend up and you whooped his ass long
Cause he hit the pipe till the rock was all gone
You're robbing and stealing, bugging and illing
While the dope man's dealing
What is killing your pain, cocaine, this shit's insane
Yo, E, she's a berry, let's run a train

[Eazy-E]
Man, I wouldn't touch that bitch

[Ice Cube]
Me neither; Ho, go home and wash out your beaver
And niggas out there messing up people's health
Yo, what the fuck yo gotta say for yourself?

[Eazy-E]
Well, I'm the dopeman - yeah, boy, wear corduroy
Money up to here but unemployed
You keep smoking that rock and my pocket's getting bigger

[Dr. Dre]
Yo, got that five-0 - double up, nigga

Eazy-E
Yeah, high rolling, big money I'm folding
Bitch on my tip for the dick I'm holding
Strung strawberry jocking me so early
Ho, you want a hit you gotta get your knees dirty
Well, that's my life that how it's cut

[Girls]
Hey, dopeman!

[Eazy-E]
Bitch, shut the fuck up
Gotta make a run, it's a big money deal
Gankers got the fake but you can get the real from the

[Hook 3]
Dopeman, dopeman!
Yeah, that's me
Dopeman, dopeman!
Yo, can I get a "g"?
Dopeman, dopeman!

Drugs.

The police.
Clock as much as he can
Fuck this shit, who am I?
THE DOPEMAN!

[Krazy D]
Yo, mister dopeman, you think you're slick
You sold crack to my sister and now she's sick
But if she happens to die because of your drug
I'm putting in your culo a .38 slug!

‘Culo’ is Spanish for ‘bottom’ or ‘buttocks’. A .38 is a weapon.

12. Quiet On Tha Set

[Intro]
Eazy-E: Yo Ren
MC Ren: What up?
Eazy-E: Take one
MC Ren: Yo
Eazy-E: Hit it

[Verse 1: MC Ren]
Ruthless, plenty of that and much more
So at the party, Ren is controllin the floor
That you step and do your dance routine
It ain't a dream my man, you're in a gangsta scene
With a villain doin damage on a 24 track
With no confusion to finish my conclusion
Rhythmatic rhymes from a radio cat
You can't take what I got coz I'll be takin it right back
Ruthless gangsta - Cold killin
You wanna know what it's means? - Definition villain
With the stupid dope rhyme
So once you hear one line you can tell it's mine
With a baseball cap that's black that I'm wearin
And a look that keeps you all starin
And wondering why I'm invincible
But when you hear my rhyme, it's convincible
I don't take no shorts while I'm constructing the ground
That makes y'all move around to my hell of a sound
Girls drool on me like a diamond
(Yo Ren, tell them what they do when you start rhymin)
I go to the party, I hip, I hop the spot
I dunno what it is, but the girls get hot
Perspirin' like they're on fire and
Their so-called boyfriends with'em are retirin
And for this reason I'm a walkin threat
So when I'm on stage I want quiet on tha set
"Light, camera, action" (N.W.A. take two)

[Verse 2: MC Ren]
Now to get started with my musical profession
A gangsta or villain in mine is in session
The way that I'm referrin' to this makes ya move
ya butt
But don't stand in a daze, yeah you should know
what's up
Anyway I keep em clappin' along
Coz' nothing bad could go wrong because this
song is so strong
I'm like Toyota, who could ask for anything
more
When N.W.A. is cold rockin' the floor
Like stupid, actin like a retard
Waitin' for a bumrush, gettin' to the good part
It tempts me so with temptation
Writin' my lyrics with this hyped information
This is a section of my creation
So don't say shhh! with an exclamation
Just look at the center of the stage where the
spotlight shines
(Boy you should have known by now) It's mine!
Unpredictable, keepin you extremely enjoyed
It's irresistible, meaning that you can't avoid
And while I'm on stage, look forward to sweat
But after I rip it up I want quiet on tha' set

"Light, camera, action" (N.W.A. take three)

[Verse 3: MC Ren + Eazy-E]
I can be loud as hell, think I will? Never
Quiet on tha' set - Yeah I like that better
Cause what I can do I think I earn respect
And if I didn't from you, that's what I expect
Cause if it ain't ruff it ain't me
So who really cares how you want me to be
See, I'm just mean staying at the top of the pile
And doin' soft note tunes it ain't my style
And this concludes our program
Of how N.W.A. makes a ruthless jam
Now first we take an average drum
Give it to Dre, and the boy gets dumb
It's no secret, that I sit alone at night
Pick up a pad and pen and begin to write
All kinda lyrics that's promised to play
To make everybody say

[Sample]
"They can be cold and ruthless no question
about that
But sometimes it's more complicated"

(Yo Dre)
(You know what I want you to do?)
(Bring that beat back, bring that beat back)

[Verse 4: MC Ren]
Now MC Ren is here working like super glue
No matter what I do, I'm gonna stick it to you
Cause I'm the pusher, supplying the fix
And this jam's so dope, it don't need a remix
But I'm making obstacles of enemy traps
To catch any MC's with the weakest raps
Crucifyin in vain like just for usin my name
The definition is pain, but that's the thing o' the game
If they try to retreat, I catch'em one at a time
Coz they're comittin a crime, and still promotin a rhyme
So, you in the back of me just listen and learn
Because you'll all get a chance or maybe a turn
Now my assignment was to give a preview
So at my next concert I wanna see you there
Not sittin in a chair standin on both feet, with yo hand in the air
Now I'm about to jet out but I'll be back
But next time expect a more funkier track
Deep down for your enjoyment to hear more percussion
With lyrics that's smooth to start some discussion
The prove that I'm hype and you know that's bet
Now continue to dance coz I'm thru with tha set

13. Something 2 Dance 2
Yo give me somethin' to dance to

Calling the police, Calling the g-men
Calling all americans to war on the underworld

[Verse 1: Arabian Prince, Dr. Dre and Eazy-E]
Arabian Prince, back wit' a style that's hype
Not slow and low, it's the fast type
Getting dumb, can you hear the drums?
Yo Dre why don't you pump it up some
I pumped it up so now what's up
Yo Yella boy, add a little cut
What the hell, you think we need some bells
Yeah, homeboy, might as well
There it is, so now what's next
A little ssssssssssss - So find me a --
Hold it, wait a minute
You need somethin' else in it
This is what I want you to do
Feel the groove, bust a move

They are encouraging the police, the government, and all Americans to wage war against the criminal underworld.
Yo, yo, I'm tired, what about you?
Man this is somethin' to dance to

Man that's wack, everybody used that
Yo, why don't you bring back the other track
Yeah there you go that's what I'm sayin
I like it when that dope stuffs playin
Real loud, in ya ear hole
Man let's go, I think my feet are swoll' from
dancin' so damn much
Maaaaaan, I don't give a what
You wanna leave? With all these females pullin
on my sleeve
I bet, you can jet, homeboy, no sweat
This is what I want you to do
Feel the groove, bust a move
(here I come to save the day)
This is somethin' to dance to

Let the bass kick
Th-th-this is somethin ta dance to
Th-th-this is somethin ta dance to
Th-th-this is somethin ta dance to
Th-th-this is somethin ta dance to
Th-th-this is somethin ta dance to
Th-th-this is somethin ta dance to
APPENDIX 2: PUBLIC ENEMY – IT TAKES A NATION OF MILLIONS TO HOLD US BACK (1988)

The following listening charts are close readings of the songs on Public Enemy’s album *It Takes a Nation of Millions to Hold Us Back* (1988). The focus of the lyrical analyses is on the sociopolitical content of the lyrics. Lyrics highlighted in yellow on the left side are further explained on the right side. All lyrics have been acquired through Genius, an online database for lyrics and musical knowledge.

*Genius | Song Lyrics & Knowledge, Genius Media Group Inc., 2018, genius.com/*.

### 1. Countdown to Armageddon

[Emcee]

Hammersmith Odeon, are you ready for the Def Jam tour? Let me hear you make some noise! In concert for BBC Television tonight and the fresh start of the week, let me hear you make some noise for PUBLIC ENEMY!

[Professor Griff]

PEACE. ARMAGEDDON HAD BEEN IN EFFECT, GO GET A LATE PASS. STEP! THIS TIME AROUND, THE REVOLUTION WILL NOT BE TELEVISED. STEP! LONDON, ENGLAND… CONSIDER YOURSELVES… WARNED! Alright, let’s make some fuckin’ noise! C’mon, let’s break this shit out and get busy!

| A synonym for ‘the end’. |
| A radical change. |

### 2. Bring the Noise

| Too black, too strong |
| Too black, too strong |

[Intro: Flava Flav]

Yo Chuck, these honey drippers are still fronting on us Show ‘em that we can do this, cause we always knew this Haha, yeah boy!

[Verse 1: Chuck D]

Bass! How low can you go? Death row, what a brother know Once again, back is the incredible rhyme animal The uncannable D, Public Enemy Number One Five-O said, “Freeze!” and I got numb Can I tell ‘em that I really never had a gun? But it’s the wax that the Terminator X spun Now they got me in a cell ’cause my records, they sell Cause a brother like me said “Well

The first phrase hints at the fact that we are going to be talking about race.

| A prison for criminals awaiting their execution. |
| Most-wanted criminal and wordplay on P.E.. The police arrests Chuck D here, even when he did not really have a gun. He is too afraid to admit this. He is in jail because of his music. |
Farrakhan’s a prophet and I think you ought to listen to what he can say to you, what you wanna do is follow for now. Power of the people say "Make a miracle, D, pump the lyrical". Black is back, all in, we’re gonna win. Check it out, yeah y'all, come on, here we go again:

[Hook]
Turn it up! Bring the noise!

[Verse 2]
Never badder than bad cause the brother is madder than mad
At the fact that's corrupt like a senator
Soul on a roll, but you treat it like soap on a rope
’Cause the beats and the lines are so dope
Listen for lessons I'm saying inside music that the critics are blasting me for
They’ll never care for the brothers and sisters now, 'cause the country has us up for the war. We got to demonstrate, come on now
They're gonna have to wait 'til we get it right
Radio stations I question their blackness
They call themselves black, but we'll see if they'll play this:

[Hook]
Turn it up! Bring the noise!

[Bridge: Flava Flav]
Ayo Chuck, they're saying we're too black, man
Yo, I don't understand what they're saying
But little do they know they can get a smack for that, man

This section talks about how Public Enemy’s music is not generally accepted. Black radio stations are even wary of playing their music.
Making a music, abuse it, but you can't do it, ya know
You call 'em demos, (but we ride limos, too)
Whatcha gonna do? Rap is not afraid of you
Beat is for Sonny Bono, (beat is for Yoko Ono)
Run-DMC first said a DJ could be a band
Stand on its own feet, get you out your seat
Beat is for Eric B. and LL as well, hell
Wax is for Anthrax, still it can rock bells
Ever forever, universal, it will sell
Time for me to exit, Terminator X-it

[Hook]
Turn it up! Bring the noise!

[Bridge: Flava Flav]
Yo, they should know by now that they can't stop this bum rush
Word up, better keep tellin' me to turn it down
But yo, Flavor Flav ain't going out like that

[Verse 4]
From coast to coast, so you stop being like a comatose
"Stand, my man? The beat's the same with a boast toast"
Rock with some pizzazz, it will last. Why you ask?
Roll with the rock stars, still never get accepted as
We got to plead the Fifth, you can investigate
Don't need to wait, get the record straight
Hey, posse in effect, got the Flavor, Terminator X to sign checks, play to get paid
We got to check it out down on the avenue
A magazine or two is dissing me and dissing you
Yeah, I'm telling you

[Outro: Flava Flav]
Hey yo, Griff, get thirty S1W, we got to handle this
We ain't goin' out like that
Yo man, straight up on the Columbo tip
We can do this, like Brutus
'Cause we always knew this
You know what I'm sayin'
There's just one thing that puzzles me, my brother
What's wrong with all these people around here, man
Is they clocking? Is they rocking? Is they shocking?...
3. Don't Believe the Hype

[Intro: Flavor Flav + Sample]

Don't—
Don't—
Don't—
Don't—
Don't—
Don't—
Don't—
Don't—

("Now here's what I want y'all to do for me")

[Verse 1: Chuck D + Flavor Flav]
Back, caught you lookin' for the same thing
It's a new thing, check out this I bring
Uh, oh, the roll below the level, 'cause I'm livin' low
Next to the bass, (C'mon!), turn up the radio
They claiming I'm a criminal
But now I wonder how, some people never know
The enemy could be their friend, guardian
I'm not a hooligan, I rock the party and
Clear all the madness, I'm not a racist
Preach to teach to all ('Cause, some, they never had this)
Number one, not born to run, about the gun
I wasn't licensed to have one
The minute they see me, fear me
I'm the epitome, of "public enemy"
Used, abused without clues
I refuse to blow a fuse
They even had it on the news

[Hook: Flavor Flav]
Don't believe the hype
Don't—
Don't—
Don't—

In the media, he (rappers and/or black people) are treated like criminals.

He is not licensed to have a gun, yet he does.

Do not simply believe what the media says.

[Verse 2]
"Yes" was the start of my last jam
So here it is again, another def jam
But since I gave you all a little something that I knew you lacked
They still consider me a new jack
All the critics you can hang 'em, I'll hold the rope
But they hope to the Pope, and pray it ain't dope
The follower of Farrakhan
Don’t tell me that you understand until you hear the man

The book of the new school rap game
Writers treat me like Coltrane, insane
Yes to them, but to me I’m a different kind
We’re brothers of the same mind, unblind
Caught in the middle and not surrendering
I don’t rhyme for the sake of riddling
Some claim that I’m a smuggler
Some say I never heard of ya, a rap burglar
False media, we don’t need it do we?
(It’s fake that’s what it be to ya, dig me?
Yo, Terminator X, step up on the stand
And show these people what time it is, boy)

**[Hook]**

Don’t—
Don’t—
Don’t—
Don’t—

Don’t believe the hype
Don’t—
Don’t—
Don’t—
Don’t—

Don’t believe the hype
Don’t believe the hype
Don’t believe the hype
Don’t believe the hype

Don’t believe the hype

**[Verse 3]**

Don’t believe the hype, it’s a sequel
As an equal can I get this through to you
My ’98 booming with a trunk of funk
All the jealous punks can’t stop the dunk
Coming from the school of hard knocks
Some perpetrate, they drink Clorox
Attack the Black, because I know they lack exact
The cold facts, and still they try to Xerox
The leader of the new school, uncool
Never played the fool, just made the rules
Remember there’s a need to get alarmed
Again I said I was a time bomb
In the daytime radio’s scared of me
Cause I’m mad, plus I’m the enemy
They can’t come on and play me in prime time
Cause I know the time, cause I’m getting mine
I get on the mix late in the night
They know I’m living right, so here go the mic—sike

We do not need the media if they are proclaiming false information.

Unlike what the media says, Public Enemy tries to convey its messages with its music as equals to others in society.
Public Enemy was brought up in poor circumstances.
Society’s attitude is to attack the black.

Public Enemy’s music is not played on the radio until very late at night, because the listeners do not accept this type of music.
Before I let it go, don't rush my show
You try to reach and grab and get elbowed
Word to Herb, yo if you can't swing this
Learn the words, you might sing this
Just a little bit of the taste of the bass for you
As you get up and dance at the LQ
When some deny it, defy it, I swing Bolos
And then they clear the lane I go solo
The meaning of all of that, some media is the wack
As you believe it's true
It blows me through the roof
Suckers, liars, get me a shovel
Some writers I know are damn devils
For them I say, don't believe the hype
(Yes, Chuck, they must be on the pipe, right?)
Their pens and pads I'll snatch cause I've had it
I'm not a addict fiending for static
I'll see their tape recorder and I grab it
(No, you can't have it back, silly rabbit)
I'm going to my media assassin, Harry Allen—
I gotta ask him
(Yes, Harry, you're a writer—are we that type?)
(Don't believe the hype)

[Hook]
Don't believe—
Don't—
Don't—
Don't believe the hype
Don't believe—
Don't—
Don't—
Don't believe the hype

[Verse 4]
I got Flavor and all those things, you know
(Yeah, boy, part two bum rush the show)
Yo Griff get the green, black and red, and
Gold down, countdown to Armageddon
'88 you wait the S1's will
Put the left in effect and I still will
Rock the hard jams, treat it like a seminar
Reach the bourgeois and rock the boulevard
Some say I'm negative, but they're not positive
But what I got to give, (The media says this?)
Red, black, and green, you know what I mean?

[Outro: Flavor Flav]
Yo, don't believe that hype
They got to be beaming that pipe, you know
what I'm saying?
Yo, them Megas got 'em going up to see
Captain Kirk
Like a jerk and they outta work

Liquor (store).
Slang for “be on the lookout” (for the police).
The media is false and you are crazy if you believe it.

The colors of the African Liberation Flag.
The end is near.

In order to reach the upper class, Public Enemy wants to treat everything like a seminar
(because these people are wealthy and well-learned).
Let me tell you a little something, man;  
A lot of people on daytime radio scared of us  
Because they too ignorant to understand the  
lyrics of the Truth that we pumping into them clogged up brain cells  
That just spun their little wooden skulls they call caps  
You know what I'm saying?  
But the S1s'll straighten it out quick-fast, in a hurry  
Don't worry, Flavor vision ain't blurry, you know what I'm saying?  
Yo, Terminator X

**[Hook]**  
Don't—  
Don't believe—  
Don't believe the hype  
Don't—  
Don't believe—  
Don't believe the hype  
Don't—  
Don't believe—  
Don't believe the hype

(White) people do not listen to Public Enemy’s music (or hip hop in general) because they are ignorant to the truth in its lyrics.

---

**4. Cold Lampin’ With Flavor**  
I'm lamping, I'm lamping, I'm cold cold lamping  
I got Louies boy, I'm not tramping  
I just came from the crib you know  
I'm on the go, throw your tank into metro  
*Live lyrics from the bank of reality*  
I kick the flyest dope maneuver technicality  
To a dope track, you wanna hike get your backpack  
Get out the wack sack!  
I'm in my Flavmobile cold lamping  
I took a G upstate cold camping  
To the Poconos, we call a hideaways  
A pack of franks and a big bag of frito lays

He is relaxing on the couch where he is rapping about reality.

Flavor Flav on a hype tip  
I'm your hype drink, come take a big sip  
I'm in position, you can't play me out the pocket  
I'll take the dopest beat you got and I'll rock it  
Like chocolate, even vanilla  
Chocolate, strawberry, sarsaparilla  
Flavors are electric, try me get a shocker  
Didn't I tell you to leave Flavor Flav alone knocker  
A clock on my chest proves I don't fess
I'm a clocker rocker, rocking with the rest
Flav in the house by Chuck D's side
Chuck got the Flavor, Flav don't hide
P.E. crazy, crazy P.E
Making crazy Louies for the shopping spree
You're eating dirt cause you like getting dirt from the graveyard
You put gravy on it
Then you pick your teeth with tombstone chips
Casket cover clips, dead women hips you do the bump with
Bones, nothing but love bones
Lifestyles of the living dead, first you live then you're dead
Died trying to clock what I said
Now I got a murder rap cause I bust your cap with Flavor
Pure Flavor

We got Magnum Brown, Shooshki Palooshki
Supercalafraghestikalagoothki
You could put that in your don't know what you said book
Took-look-yuk-duk-wuk
Innovative ill factors by the Flavor Flav
Come and ride the Flavor wave
In any year on any given day
What a brother know, what do Flavor say
Why do the record play that way
Prime time merrily in the day
Right now this radio station is busy
Brain knowledgeably wizzy
Honey drippers, you say you got it
You ain't got no flavor and I can prove it
Flavor Flav the flav all of flavors
Onion and garlic french fried potatoes
Make your breath stink, breath fire
Make any onion the best crier
I know it sounds crazy but it fits perfect
Peter perfect picked a perfect Peter
Honey dripper, sucker sipper, big dipper, sucker dripper
Dripping suckers til it's going out of style
Creating suckers for the Flavor Flav pile
Flavor Flav the flavor of the pile
Lamping boy Medina style
Kicking the flavor, getting busy
You're going out, I think you're dizzy
I think you're hungry cause you're starving for Flavor
Flavor most, put it on your toast
Eat it and taste it and swallow it down
Imperial Flavor gives you the crown
Of the king called Flavor, the king of all flavors
Rolls and rolls and rolls of life savers
Flavor Flav is in everything you eat
Cause everything you eat got flavor
Flavor Flav is the first taste you get in the morning
Your breakfast is the flavor
In between that your lunch, in between that your dinner
In between that your midnight flavor
That's right, boy

5. Terminator X To The Edge Of Panic

[Intro]
"At the count of three, I want you to tell me the name of my DJ. One, two, three!"
"Terminator X!"
"Yo, I gotta hear that one more time, man. One, two, three!"
"Terminator X!"
"Yeah, boy! For all those that didn't understand, Terminator X!"
"Terminator X, savior of the universe"
"Terminator X, it!"
Go, Go, Go, Go, Go, Go (x6)

"The federal government is the number one killer and destroyer of Black leaders!"

[Verse 1]
Take a look at his style (yeah)
Take a check of the sound
Off the record people keep him down
Trick a chick in Miami, Terminator X packs the jams
Who gives a fuck about a goddamn Grammy?
Anyway and I say the D's defending the mike
Yeah, who gives a fuck about what they like, right?
The power is bold, the rhymes politically cold
No judge can ever budge or ever handle his load
Yes the coming is near and he's about to become
The one and only missionary lord, son of a gun
Going on and on back trackin' the whack
Explain the knack y'all for the actual fact, c'mon

[Hook]
Terminator X Go off (4X)
Go, Go, Go, Go, Go, Go

[Verse 2]
He goes on and on 'till he reaches the coast
Tired, wired of his own race playing him close
Understand his type of music kills the Plan of the klan
You know the pack attack the man

The music Terminator X makes is a statement against the ‘klan’ a.k.a. the Ku Klux Klan: a racist group that pleas for white supremacy.
With the palm of his hands
Police, wild beasts, dogs on a leash
No peace to reach - that's why he's packin' his
black piece
Terminator X yellin' with his hands
Damn almighty ruinin' ready to jam
But his cuts drive against the belt
Shiit...he's bad by his damn self
Yeah, his one job cold threatens the crowd
The loud sound pound to make brothers proud

[Hook]

[Verse 3]
Gettin' small makin' room for it all
Flavors on the phone so he can...
Make the call
I know you're clockin' the enemy
You should be clockin' the time
Checkin' records I'm wreckin' you
For defecting my rhyme
No provokin', no jokin', you know the stage is set
If you're thinkin' I'm breakin'
He ain't rocked it yet
My education is takin' you for a long ride
I'll make your brain slip and do the slide
Glide into infinity, it's infinite
With your hands in your pockets
I know your money is spent
Like this, like that, butter for the fat
If you kill my dog, I'mma slay your cat
It's like that y'all, can you handle it son
I'm public enemy number one

[Hook]

6. Mind Terrorist
[Instrumental]

7. Louder Than A Bomb
[Intro: Flava Flav]
They claim we're products from the bottom of hell
Cause the black is back and it's bound to sell
Picture us cooling out on the Fourth of July
And if you heard we were celebrating, that's a worldwide lie
Yo Chuck, the fat generals man, trying to pull a 226 on you, G! Yo man, show 'em what you got!
The black race is a burden to society.
The reason for this is that hip hop music sells and that society does not like this music.
African Americans are not celebrating patriotism: they are not a part of America.
Police code for drugs. They are trying to blame Flava Flav for possession of drugs.
[Verse 1: Chuck D]
This style seems wild
Wait before you treat me like a stepchild
Let me tell you why they got me on file
Cause I give you what you lack, come right and exact
Our status is the saddest so I care where you at, black
And at home I got a call from Tony Rome
The FBI was tappin' my telephone
I never live alone, I never walk alone
My posse's always ready, and they're waitin' in my zone
Although I live the life that of a resident
But I be knowin' the scheme that of the president
Tappin' my phone whose crews abused
I stand accused of doing harm, cause I'm louder than a bomb

[Hook]
Come on, come on (Louder!)
Come on, come on (Louder!)
Come on, come on (Louder!)

[Verse 2]
I am a rock hard trooper to the bone, the bone, the bone
Full grown, consider me - stone
Once again and I say it for you to know
The troop is always ready, I yell "Geronimo!"
Your CIA, you see I ain't kiddin'
Both King and X they got rid of both
A story untold, true but unknown
Professor Griff knows, "Yo, I ain't milquetoast!"
And not the braggin' or boastin' and plus it ain't no secret
Why they're tappin' my phone, although I can't keep it a secret
So I decided to kick it, yo
And yes it weighs a ton, I say it once again
I'm called the enemy, I'll never be a friend
Of those with closed minds, don't know I'm rapid
The way that I rap it Is makin' 'em tap it, yeah
Never servin' 'em well, cause I'm an un-Tom
It's no secret at all 'cause I'm louder than a bomb

[Hook]
Come on, come on (Louder!)
Come on, come on (Louder!)
Come on, come on (Louder!)

The status of the black race in society is deplorable. They are at the bottom.
The government is wiretapping the rapper. This form of espionage makes the rapper feel like is being watched all the time.
The spying is a plan of the government.
Wiretap.
The rapper is being accused of a crime. This crime is likely his music, which is of demonstrational nature.
The government actively tries to do away with black resistance (e.g. Martin Luther King and Malcolm X).
It is not a secret why they are spying on the rapper: he is part of the resistance.
Black is the enemy in society.

“Un-Tom” is a reference to Uncle Tom’s Cabin. He demonstrates against the government loudly (through his music).
Come on, come on (Louder!)
(It's yours!)

[Verse 3]
Cold holdin' the load, the burden breakin' the mold
I ain't lyin' denyin', cause they're checkin' my code
Am I buggin' cause they're buggin' my phone - for information
No tellin' who's sellin' out - power buildin' the nation so
Joinin' the set, the point blank target
Every brothers inside, so least not, you forget, no

Takin' the blame is not a waste, here taste
A bit of the song so you can never be wrong
Just a bit of advice, cause we be payin' the price
Cause every brother mans life is like swingin' the dice, right?
Here it is, once again this is the brother to brother
The Terminator, the cutter
Goin' on an' on - leave alone the grown
Get it straight in '88, an' I'll troop it to demonstrate
The posse always ready - 98 at 98
My posse come quick, because my posse got velocity
Tappin' my phone, they never leave me alone
I'm even lethal when I'm unarmed
Cause I'm louder than a bomb

[Hook]
Come on, come on (Louder!)
Come on, come on (Louder!)
Come on, come on (Louder!) (Yeah!)
Come on, come on (Louder!)
Come on, come on (Louder!)
Come on, come on (Louder!)
Come on, come on (Louder!)
(Right)

[Verse 4]
Cause the D is for dangerous
You can come and get some of this
I teach and speak
So when its spoke, it's no joke
The voice of choice, the place shakes with bass
Called one for the treble
The rhythm is the rebel
Here's a funky rhyme that they're tappin' on
Just thinkin' I'm breakin' the beats I'm rappin' on
CIA, FBI, all they tell us is lies
And when I say it, they get alarmed
Cause I'm louder than a bomb

Rapping is educating people about current affairs.

The government tells society lies, but the authorities keep spying on/acussing him when the rapper makes this known through his music.
8. Caught, Can We Get a Witness?

[Verse 1: Chuck D]
Caught, now in court cause I stole a beat
This is a sampling sport
But I'm giving it a new name, what you hear is mine
P.E. you know the time
Now, what in the heaven does a jury know about
Hell, if I took it, but they just look at me
Like, "Hey I'm on a mission, check it out y'all: condition"
Ain't right, sittin' like dynamite
Gonna blow you up and it just might
Blow up the bench and
Judge, the courtroom plus I gotta mention
This court is dismissed when I grab the mike
Yo Flav...What is this?

[Verse 2]
Get hyped, c'mon we gotta
Gather around - gotcha
Mail from the courts and jail
Claims I stole the beats that I rail
Look at how I'm livin' like
And they're gonna check the mike, right? - Sike
Look at how I'm livin' now, lower than low
What a sucker know
Found this mineral that I call a beat
Paid zero
I packed my load cause it's better than gold
People don't ask the price, but its sold
They say that I sample
But they should sample this my pit bull
We ain't goin' for this, they say that I stole this
Can I get a witness?
Understand where we're goin
Then listen to this, plus my Roland
Comin' from way down below
Rebound, c'mon boost up the stereo
Snakes in the morning
Wake up, scared afraid of my warning
They claim that I'm violent
Now I choose to be silent, can I get a witness?

[Verse 3]
C'mon get wit' it
Something ain't right, I got to admit it
Made me mad when I was on tour
That I declared war on black radio
They say that I planned this
On the radio most of you will demand this

The rapper is facing prosecution because he allegedly stole something (i.e. music).

He is being accused for stealing other people’s music.

His living conditions are deplorable.

He is accused of stealing music, but he demands a witness.

He is accused of being violent, but he demands a witness.

He is being critical of black radio stations, because they are accusing him of stealing.
Won't be on a playlist
Bust the way that I say this: No Sell Out

[Verse 4]
You singers are spineless
As you sing your senseless songs to the mindless
Your general subject love is minimal
Its sex for profit
Scream that I sample
For example, Tom you ran to the federal Court in U.S. it don't mean you Yeah, cause they fronted on you
The posses ready, Terminator X yes he's ready
The S1Ws, Griff are you ready?

They say that I stole this
I rebel with a raised fist, can we get a witness?

The rapper accuses other singers of making meaningless music.

Public Enemy’s security gang.

Public Enemey is standing up against the allegations: they demand a witness.

9. Show ‘Em Whatcha Got

[Intro]
Freedom is a road seldom traveled by the multitude

[Chuck D and Flavor Flav samples repeat throughout]
Public Enemy Number 1 - Show ‘Em Whatcha Got

[Ava Muhammad]
The same God that gave wisdom to Marcus Garvey
The same God that gave wisdom to Adam Clayton Powell
The same God that gave wisdom to Stephen Biko
The same God that gave wisdom to Rosa Parks
Gave strength to Martin Luther King, to Malcolm X
The same God that gave wisdom to Nelson Mandela
The same God that gave wisdom to Winnie Mandela
Stay strong sister
Brothers and sisters, please, join with me to welcome, and listen here

Freedom is not self-evident.

All of the people named in this section are all black people who fought for race equality and black rights.

10. She Watch Channel Zero?!

[Intro: Flavor Flav]
You're blind, baby
You're blind from the facts on who you are
Cause you're watching that garbage

[Verse 1: Chuck D]
The woman makes the men all pause
And if you got a woman she might make you
forget yours
There's a five letter word to describe her
character
But her brains being washed by an actor
And every real man that tries to approach
Come the closer he comes, he gets dissed like a roach

[Refrain]
I don't think I can handle she goes channel to channel
Cold looking for that hero, she watch channel zero

[Hook]
She watch, she watch, she watch, she watch
She watch, she watch, she watch, she watch
She watch, she watch, she watch, she watch
She watch, she watch, she watch, she watch
She watch, she watch, she watch, she watch
She watch, she watch, she watch, she watch
Zero

[Flavor Flav]
Yo baby, you got to cut that garbage off
Yo! I wanna watch the game
What is you doing?
Hey yo, let me tell you a little something
I'mma take all your soaps and then I'm gonna hang 'em on a rope
You know what I'm saying?
Cause that garbage you're watching don't make no sense
Hey yo let me tell you a little something baby
I'mma take your set and I'mma throw it out the window, G!

[Verse 2: Chuck D]
2, 7, 5, 4, 8 she watched she said
All added up to zero, and nothing in her head
She turns and turns and she hopes the soaps
Are for real, she learns that it ain't true, nope
But she won't survive and rather die in a lie
Fall a fool for some dude on a tube

[Refrain]
He is claiming his girlfriend is educated about herself and her culture wrongly because of TV.

Television shows are indoctrinating her with certain views and norms.

The TV channels are keeping her dumb.
Yo baby, you think I'm joking? Do I look like I'm joking?
I ain't joking, word up, baby
Yo, cut that garbage off now
Yo, I got the Tyson fight on, you know what I'm saying?
Yo, so you can't be coming here and stagnating like that, you know what I'm saying?
Yo, we getting ready to watch the Super Bowl
We got a black quarterback so step back!

Trouble vision for a sister cause I know she don't know, I quote
Her brain's been trained by a 24 inch remote
Revolution a solution for all of our children
But her children don't mean as much as the show, I mean
Watch her worship the screen and fiend
For a TV ad, and it just makes me mad

Yo baby, can't you see that's nonsense you watching?
Look, don't nobody look like that, nobody even live that, you know what I'm saying?
You watching garbage, nothing but garbage, straight up garbage
Yo, why don't you just back up from the TV, read a book or something
Read about yourself, learn your culture, you know what I'm saying?
Yo let me tell you a little something

Have you forgotten that once we were brought here, we were robbed of our name, robbed of our language. We lost our religion, our culture, our god...and many of us, by the way we act, we even lost our minds

Here it is, BAM!
And you say "Goddamn, this is the dope jam"
But let's define the term called dope
And you think it mean funky now, no

**Here is a true tale**

Of the ones that deal, are the ones that fail
Yeah, you can move if you wanna move
What it prove? It's here like the groove
The problem is this, we gotta' fix it
Check out the justice, and how they run it
Selling, smelling, sniffing, riffing
And brothers try to get swift and
Sell their own, rob a home
While some shrivel to bone
Like comatose walking around
Please don't confuse this with the sound
I'm talking about

-[Scratching]-
"Bass!"
"One, two, three, four, five, six"
"Kick it!"
"Years ago"

[Verse 2]
I put this together to rock the bells of those that
boost the dose
Of lack a lack, and those that sell to Black
Shame on a brother when he dealing
The same block where my 98 be wheeling
And everybody know another kilo
From a corner from a brother to keep another
below
Stop illing and killing, stop grilling
Yo, black, yo (we are willing)
4, 5 o'clock in the morning
Wait a minute y'all, the fiends are fiending
Day to day they say no other way
This stuff... is really bad
I'm talking 'bout...BASS

[Verse 3]
Yo, listen
I see it on their faces
(First come, first serve basis)
Standing in line, checking the time
Homeboys playing the curb, the same ones that
used to do herb
Now they're gone, passing it on
Poison attack - the Black word bond
My man Daddy-O once said to me
He knew a brother who stayed all day in his jeep
And at night he went to sleep
And in the morning all he had was the sneakers
on his feet
The culprit used to jam and rock the mike, yo

Agency and authority.

There is a drug (dealing) problem in the black neighborhoods.

Stop murder and staring down on one another.

A fiend is an addict.

Bass is a (musical) wordplay on ‘baseheads’,
meaning drug addicts.
He stripped the Jeep to fill his pipe
And wander around to find a place
Where they rocked to a different kind of... **BASS**

**[Professor Griff]**

_Succotash_ is a means for kids to make cash
_Selling drugs_ to the brother man instead of the other man

**[Chuck D]**

I'm talking 'bout... **BASS**

A wordplay on drugs.

Making money through sexual acts/prostitution.

There is a drug problem in the neighborhood.

Drugs.

12. Black Steel in the Hour of Chaos

**[Flavor Flav]**

Bass for your face, London! Everybody in the house make some noise! I want everybody in the house to say "ho!" (Ho!) Yo Chuck, kick it to 'em, man

**[Intro]**

A ballad behind bars or you could say real rock from the rock. An unusual musical happening in a most unusual place. The state prison... (Get in that cell, nigga!)

**[Verse 1]**

I got a letter from the government the other day
I opened and read it, it said they were suckers
They wanted me for their army or whatever
Picture me giving a damn, I said never
Here is a land that never gave a damn
About a brother like me and myself because they never did
I wasn't with it but just that very minute it occurred to me

_The suckers had authority_
Cold sweating as I dwell in my cell, how long has it been?

They got me sitting in the **state pen**
I gotta get out, but that thought was thought before

I contemplated a plan on the cell floor
I'm not a fugitive on the run
But a brother like me begun to be another one

 _Public enemy serving time_
They drew the line y'all, to criticize me some crime

Nevertheless, _they could not understand that I'm a Black man_
And I could never be a veteran
On the strength, the situation's unreal
I got a raw deal, so I'm looking for the **steel**

This song is written from the state prison.

The rapper received a military draft notice letter from the government. He disapproves.

The United States does not care about the black race.

Yet, they are still the ones ruing the country.

The state penitentiary.

A plan to escape prison.

He is serving time in prison.

Veterans are respected in society. The rapper doubts whether a black veteran would receive the same level of respect.

The steel of the bars in prison OR a weapon.
[Verse 2]
They got me rotting in the time that I'm serving
Telling you what happened the same time they're throwing
Four of us packed in a cell like slaves, oh well
The same motherfucker got us living in his hell
You have to realize, what it's a form of slavery
Organized under a swarm of devils
Straight up - word 'em up on the level
The reasons are several, most of them federal
Here is my plan anyway and I say
I got gusto, but only some I can trust, yo
Some do a bid from 1 to 10
But I never did, and plus I never been
I'm on a tier where no tears should ever fall
Cell block and locked, I never clock it y'all
Cause time and time again
Time, they got me serving to those and to them,
I'm not a citizen
But ever when I catch a C-O
Sleeping on the job, my plan is on go-ahead
On the strength, I'ma tell you the deal
I got nothing to lose
Cause I'm going for the steel

[Verse 3]
Don't you know I caught a C-O
Falling asleep on death row
I grabbed his gun, then he did what I said so
And every man's demand got served
Along with the time they served, decency was deserved
To understand my demands
I gave a warning, I wanted the governor, y'all
And plus the warden to know
That I was innocent because I'm militant
Posing a threat, you bet it's fucking up the government
My plan said I had to get out and break north
Just like Oliver's neck, I had to get off
My boys had the feds in check
They couldn't do nothing
We had a force to instigate a prison riot
This is what it takes for peace
So I just took the piece
Black for Black inside time to cut the leash
Freedom to get out to the ghetto, no sell out
6 C-Os we got we ought to put their head out
But I'll give 'em a chance, cause I'm civilized
As for the rest of the world, they can't realize
A cell is hell, I'm a rebel so I rebel
Between bars, got me thinking like an animal
Got a woman C-O to call me a copter
She tried to get away, and I popped her
Twice, right? Now who wanna get nice?
I had 6 C-Os, now it's 5 to go
And I'm serious, call me delirious
But I'm still a captive, I gotta rap this
Time to break as time grows intense
I got the **steel** in my right hand, now I'm looking for the fence

[Verse 4]
I ventured into the courtyard
Followed by 52 brothers bruised, battered, and scarred but hard
Going out with a bang, ready to bang out
But power from the sky and from the tower shots rang out
A high number of dose, yes and some came close
Figure I trigger my steel, stand and hold my post
This is what I mean, an **anti-nigga machine**
If I come out alive and then they won't come clean
And then I threw up **my steel bullets flew up**
And to my surprise the water tower blew up, who shot
What, who, what, the bazooka was who
And to my rescue, it was the **S1Ws**
Secured my getaway, so I just got away
The joint broke, from the black smoke
Then they saw it was rougher than the average bluffer
Cause the **steel was black, the attitude exact**
Now the chase is on telling you to c'mon 53 brothers on the run, and we are gone

The weapon.
The inmates escaped.
The inmates are under attack.
He asserts the federal system is anti-African Americans.
He used the weapon.
A security gang came to save him.
The weapon was used by a black person for the right reasons.

13. Security of the First World
[Instrumental]

14. Rebel Without a Pause
[Intro]
Brothers and sisters, **I don’t know what this world’s coming to**

[Verse 1: Chuck D]
Yes - the rhythm, the rebel without a pause - I'm lowering my level
The hard rhymer - where you never been I'm in
You want styling - you know it's time again
D the enemy - telling you to hear it
They praised the music - this time they play the lyrics
Some say no to the album, the show

He is expressing his concerns about what has become of humanity.
He rebels non-stop.
He has experienced (bad) things that most people will likely (and hopefully) never experience.

Allusion to the movie **Rebel Without a Cause.**
Bum Rush The Sound - I made a year ago
I guess you know - you guess I'm just a radical
Not on sabbatical - yes to make it critical
The only part your body should be parting to
Panther power on the hour from the rebel to you

[Flavor Flav]
Hey yo Chuck, I don't understand this man!
Yo, we got to slow down man, we losing them!

[Verse 2: Chuck D]
Radio - suckers never play me
On the mix - they just O.K. me
Now known and grown when they're clocking
my zone it's known
Snaking and taking everything that a brother owns
Hard - my calling card
Recorded and ordered - supporter of Chesimard
Loud and proud kicking live next poet supreme
Loop a troop, bazooka, the scheme
Flavor - a rebel in his own mind
Supporter of my rhyme
Designed to scatter a line of suckers who claim I

do crime
They on my time ticket

[Flavor Flav]
Yo chuck, they think we takin shorts!
Show em this is cold medina

[Hook]
Terminator X, Terminator X
Terminator X, Terminator

[Flavor Flav:]
Yo chuck, you gettin' em nervous they can't handle this, they gonna breakdown

[Verse 3: Chuck D]
From a rebel it's final on black vinyl
Soul, rock and roll coming like a rhino
Tables turn - suckers burn to learn
They can't disable the power of my label
Def Jam - tells you who I am
The enemy's public - they really give a damn
Strong Island - where I got 'em whylin'
That's the reason they're claiming that I'm violent

Never silent - no dope getting dumb nope
Claiming where we get our rhythm from
Number one - we hit ya and we give ya some
No gun - and still never on the run
You wanna be an S.1 - Griff will tell you when

The Black Panther Movement.

He is being ignored by the radio stations.

Society takes everything away from African Americans.

The government/society claims he is a criminal.

An alcoholic drink.

He is allegedly violent.

He is not violent. He does not even have a weapon.
And then you'll come again you'll know what
time it is

**Impeach the president** - pulling out my ray-gun
Zap the next one - I could be your Shogun
Suckers - don't last a minute
Soft and smooth - I ain't with it
Hardcore - rawbone like a razor
I'm like a laser - I just won't graze ya
Old enough to raise ya - so this'll faze ya
Get it right boy and maybe I will praise ya
Playing the role, I got soul too
Voice my opinion with volume
Smooth - not what I am
Rough - 'cause I'm a man
No matter what the name - we're all the same
Pieces - in one big chess game
Yeah - the voice of power
Is in the house - go take a shower boy

**P.E. a group, a crew - not singular**

We wear black Wranglers
We're rap stranglers
You can't angle us - I know you're listening
I caught you pissin' in your pants
You're scared of us dissing us
The crowd is missing us

**We're on a mission y'all**

[Flavor Flav]
Yo Chuck! yeah man!
Yo you got em runnin' scared!

[Hook]
Terminator X, Terminator X
Terminator X, Terminator

[Verse 4]
Attitude - when I'm on fire
Juice on the loose - electric wire
Simple and plain - give me the lane
I'll throw it down your throat like Barkley
You see my car keys - you'll never get these
They belong to the 98 posse
You want some more son - you wanna get some
Bum rush the door of a store - pick up the album
You know the rhythm, the rhyme plus the beat
is designed
So I can enter your mind, boys!
Bring the noise - my time
Step aside for the flex - Terminator X

[Flavor Flav]
Yeah that's right

This jam is rated cold medina, boy
That's right, cold medina, that's right
We showin' up in E-F-E-C-T also known as effect
You understand what I'm sayin'?

[Outro]
Yeah! Yeah boy!
Bring that beat back
Bring that beat back one more time, Chuck
Y'all wanna hear that beat, right?
Bring that beat back

15. Prophets of Rage
[Intro + scratching]
You're quite hostile
I got a right to be hostile, man, my people are being persecuted!
"Chuck, Chuck, Chuck, run, run, run a power move on them"

[Verse 1]
With vice, I hold the mic device
With force, I keep it away of course
And I'm keeping you from sleeping
And on a stage I rage, and I'm rollin'
To the poor, I pour in on in metaphors
Not bluffing, it's nothing that we ain't did before
We played, you stayed
The points made you consider it
Done by the prophets of rage
(Power of the people say)

[Verse 2]
I roll with the punches so I survive
Try to rock cause it keeps the crowd alive
I'm not ballin', I'm just callin'
But I'm past the days of yes y'allin'
Wa-wiggle round and round
I pump, you jump up
Hear my words my verbs and get juiced up
(juiced up)
I been around a while
You can describe my sound
Clear the way for the prophets of rage
(Power of the people say)

[Verse 3]
I rang ya bell, can you tell I got feeling?
Just peace at least cause I want it
I want it so bad that I'm starving
I'm like Garvey, so you can see B?
It's like that, I'm like Nat, leave me the hell alone

The rapper claims he has the right to be hostile because his people (African Americans) are being persecuted.

Immoral.

He uses his raps to communicate with and about the poor.

The rapper is the leader of resistance.
Power to the people.

Marcus Garvey: fought for black rights.
Nat Turner: led a slave rebellion.
If you don't think I'm a brother then check the chromosomes
Then check the stage, I declare it a new age
Get down for the prophets of rage
(Can you kick it like this?)

[Verse 4]
You back the track, you find we're the quotable
You emulate, brothers, sisters, that's beautiful
Follow a path of positivity you go
Some sing it or rap it or harmonize it through
Go-Go
Little you know but very seldom I do party jams
About a plan, I'm considered the man
I'm the recordable but God made it affordable
I say it, you play it back in your car or even portable
(Stereo, stereo) Describes my scenario
Left or right, Black or White
They tell lies in the books that you're readin'
It's knowledge of yourself that you're needin'
I'm like Vesey or Prosser, we have a reason why
To debate the hate that's why we're born to die
Mandela, cell dweller, Thatcher
You can tell her clear the way for the prophets of rage
(Power of the people you say)

[Verse 5]
It's raw and keeping you on the floor
Its soul and keeping you in control
It's part two cause I'm pumping what you're used to
Until the whole Juice Crew gets me in my goose down
I do the rebel yell (and I'm the Duracell)
Call it plain insane, brothers causing me pain
When a brother's a victim
And the sellers a dweller in a cage
(Yo, run the acapella G)
(Power of the people you say)
You're quite hostile

16. Party For Your Right to Fight

[Verse 1]
Power and equality
And we're out to get it
I know some of you ain't with it
This party started right in '66
With a pro-Black radical mix
Then at the hour of twelve
Their goal is power and equality for the black.

The Black Panther Party was founded in 1966.
Some force cut the power and emerged from hell

It was your so called government that made this occur
Like the grafted devils they were

[Verse 2]
J. Edgar Hoover, and he coulda proved to you
He had King and X set up
Also the party with Newton, Cleaver and Seale
He ended, so get up
Time to get em back (You got it)
Get back on the track (You got it)
Word from the honorable Elijah Muhammad
Know who you are to be Black

PARTY FOR YOUR RIGHT TO FIGHT
FIGHT
PARTY FOR YOUR RIGHT TO FIGHT
FIGHT

[Verse 3]
To those that disagree it causes static
For the original Black Asiatic man
Cream of the earth and was here first
And some devils prevent this from being known
But you check out the books they own
Even Masons they know it
But refuse to show it, yo
But it's proven and fact
And it takes a nation of millions to hold us back

Statement against the government: they are the ones who caused this misery.

The first director of the FBI. The rapper thinks there was a conspiracy against Martin Luther King and Malcom X, as well as some members of the Black Panther Party.
The rapper wants to get these people back.

An African American religious leader.
Take pride in being black. Know your roots.
Celebrate the fact that you have the right to fight and demonstrate.

Freemasons: disadvantageous for African Americans.
They cannot be stopped in their quest for equal rights.
APPENDIX 3: KENDRICK LAMAR – TO PIMP A BUTTERFLY (2015)

The following listening charts are close readings of the songs on Kendrick Lamar’s album To Pimp a Butterfly (2015). The focus of the lyrical analyses is on the sociopolitical content of the lyrics. Lyrics highlighted in yellow on the left side are further explained on the right side. All lyrics have been acquired through Genius, an online database for lyrics and musical knowledge.


1. Wesley’s Theory

[Produced by Flying Lotus & Ronald "Flippa" Colson
Additional production by Sounwave & Thundercat]

[Sample: Boris Gardiner]
Every nigga is a star, ayy, every nigga is a star
Every nigga is a star, ayy, every nigga is a star
Who will deny that you and I and every nigger is a star?

[Intro: Josef Leimberg]
Hit me!

When the four corners of this cocoon collide
You’ll slip through the cracks hopin' that you’ll survive
Gather your wit, take a deep look inside
Are you really who they idolize?

To pimp a butterfly

[Chorus: Kendrick Lamar]
At first, I did love you
But now I just wanna fuck
Late nights thinkin' of you
Until I get my nut

Tossed and turned, lesson learned
You was my first girlfriend
Bridges burned, all across the board
Destroyed, but what for?

[Verse 1: Kendrick Lamar]
When I get signed, homie, I'ma act a fool
Hit the dance floor, strobe lights in the room
Snatch your little secretary bitch for the homies
Blue-eyed devil with a fat-ass monkey
I'ma buy a brand new Caddy on fours
Trunk the hood up, two times, deuce-four
Platinum on everythin', platinum on weddin' ring
Married to the game and a bad bitch chose

When I get signed, homie, I'ma buy a strap
Straight from the CIA, set it on my lap
Take a few M-16s to the hood
Pass 'em all out on the block, what's good?

The sample suggests there is a prejudice that all black people are stars or rappers.

Reference to ‘butterfly’: a metaphor for the beauty of an artist’s work. The cocoon is a metaphor for the ghetto.

‘To pimp a butterfly’ means artists are being exploited by the music industry. These lines a a reference to that.

Fantasizing about getting a contract at a record label.

Fantasizing about getting a contract at a record label. A ‘strap’ is a slang term for a gun. A rifle.
I'ma put the Compton swap meet by the White House Republican run up, get socked out. Hit the prez with a Cuban link on my neck. Uneducated, but I got a million-dollar check like that.

[Refrain: Thundercat & George Clinton]
We should've never gave
We should've never gave niggas money
Go back home, money, go back home
We should've never gave
We should've never gave niggas money
Go back home, money, go back home
(Everybody get out)

[Chorus: Kendrick Lamar, Thundercat & George Clinton]
At first, I did love you (Love you)
But now I just wanna fuck (I just wanna fuck)
Late nights thinkin' of you (Of you)
Until I get my nut (Till get my nut)
Tossed and turned, lesson learned
You was my first girlfriend
Bridges burned, all across the board (Across the board)
Destroyed, but what for?

[Break: Dr. Dre]
Yo, what's up? It's Dre
Remember the first time you came out to the house?
You said you wanted a spot like mine
But remember, anybody can get it
The hard part is keepin' it, motherfucker

[Verse 2: Kendrick Lamar]
What you want you? A house or a car?
Forty acres and a mule, a piano, a guitar?
Anythin', see, my name is Uncle Sam, I'm your dog
Motherfucker, you can live at the mall
I know your kind (That's why I'm kind)
Don't have receipts (Oh, man, that's fine)
Pay me later, wear those gators
Cliché, then say, "Fuck your haters"
I can see the baller in you, I can see the dollar in you
Little white lies, but it's no white-collar in you
But it's whatever though because I'm still followin' you
Because you make me live forever, baby
Count it all together, baby
Then hit the register and make me feel better, baby

He is going to trade in Compton for the White House.
Republicans are seen as white supremacists.
A gold necklace typically worn by rappers.
He was not able to go to school, but made a lot of money as an artist.

Fame comes and goes.

Refers to an agrarian deal offered to ex-slaves.
Metaphor for the United States.

This entire section talks about American capitalism in a judgmental way.
Your horoscope is a gemini, two sides
So you better cop everything two times
Two coupes, two chains, **two C-notes**
Too much ain't enough, both we know
Christmas, tell 'em what's on your wish list
Get it all, you deserve it, Kendrick
And when you hit the White House, do you
But remember, you ain't pass economics in school
**And everything you buy, taxes will deny**
I'll Wesley Snipe your ass before thirty-five

[Bridge: George Clinton & Kendrick Lamar]
Yeah, lookin' down, it's quite a drop (It's quite a drop, drop, drop)
Lookin' good when you're on top (When you're on top, you got it)
You got a medal for us
Leavin' metaphors metaphysically in a state of euphoria
Look both ways before you cross my mind

[Refrain: Thundercat & George Clinton]
We should've never gave
We should've never gave niggas money
Go back home, money, go back home
We should've never gave
We should've never gave niggas money
Go back home, money, go back home

[Outro]
/Tax man comin', tax man comin'/
/Tax man comin', tax man comin'/
/Tax man comin', tax man comin'/
/Tax man comin', tax man comin'/

American capitalism.

**2. For Free? (Interlude)**
[Produced by Terrace Martin]

[Intro: Darlene Tibbs]
Fuck you, motherfucker, you a ho-ass nigga
I don't know why you trying to go big, nigga,
you ain't shit
Walking around like you God's gift to Earth,
nigga, you ain't shit
You ain't even buy me no outfit for the **fourth**
I need that Brazilian, wavy, twenty-eight inch,
you playin'
I shouldn't be fuckin' with you anyway
I need a baller-ass, boss-ass nigga
You's a off-brand-ass nigga, everybody know it
Your homies know it, everybody fuckin' know
Fuck you, nigga, don't call me no more

The N-word is very rude. Black people tolerate the word when said by blacks, but not by whites.

The Fourth of July: Independence Day.
You won't know, you gonna lose on a good bitch
My other nigga is on, you off
What the fuck is really going on?
[Verse: Kendrick Lamar]

This dick ain't free
You lookin' at me like it ain't a receipt
Like I never made ends meet
Eating your leftovers and raw meat
This dick ain't free
Livin' in captivity raised my cap salary
Celery, tellin' me green is all I need
Evidently all I seen was Spam and raw sardines
This dick ain't free, I mean, baby
You really think we could make a baby named Mercedes
Without a Mercedes Benz and twenty-four inch rims

Five percent tint, and air conditioning vents?
Hell fuckin' naw, this dick ain't free
I need forty acres and a mule
Not a forty ounce and a pit bull
Bullshit, matador, matador
Had the door knockin', let 'em in, who's that?
Genital's best friend, this dick ain't free
Pity the fool that made the pretty in you prosper
Titty juice and pussy lips kept me obnoxious
Kept me up watchin' pornos in poverty; apology? No
Watch you politic with people less fortunate,
like myself
Every dog has its day, now doggy style shall help

This dick ain't free
Matter of fact, it need interest
Matter of fact, it's nine inches
Matter of fact, see our friendship based on business
Pension, more pension, you're pinchin' my percents
It's been relentless, fuck forgiveness, fuck your feelings
Fuck your sources, all distortion, if you fuck it's more abortion
More divorce courts and portion
My check with less endorsement left me dormant
Dusted, doomed, disgusted, forced with Fuck you think is in more shit?
Porcelain pipes pressure, bust 'em twice
Choice is devastated, decapitated the horseman
Oh America, you bad bitch, I picked cotton and made you rich
Now my dick ain't free

She trades Kendrick, an African American, in very easily.

‘Dick’ is a metaphor for the black man’s strength and dignity. Lamar is saying no to the exploitation and mistreatment of Black people. Black people are always second-class in society. No more mistreatment of black people. Caught in society and a metaphor for slavery. Green is a slang term for money.

No more mistreatment of black people.
Refers to an agrarian deal offered to ex-slaves. A can of liquor.

Yet, he lives in poverty.

Lamar’s efforts are not for free and he needs to be taken care of as well: not only white people.

Porcelain is a symbol for the (white) upper class.

African Americans used to be slaves for America’s fortune. Lamar now demands something in return.
**[Intro]**

I got a bone to pick
I don't want you monkey-mouth motherfuckers
Sittin' in my throne again
Ayy, ayy, nigga what's happenin'?
K-Dot back in the hood, nigga!
I'm mad (He mad!), but I ain't stressin'
True friends, one question

**[Chorus 1]**

Bitch, where you when I was walkin'? Now I run the game, got the whole world talkin'
King Kunta, everybody wanna cut the legs off him
Kunta, black man taking no losses, oh yeah
Bitch, where you when I was walkin'? Now I run the game, got the whole world talkin'
King Kunta, everybody wanna cut the legs off him
When you got the **yams**—(What's the yams?)

**[Verse 1]**

The **yam** is the power that be
You can smell it when I'm walkin' down the street
(Oh yes, we can, oh yes, we can)
I can dig rappin', but a rapper with a ghost writer?
What the fuck happened? (Oh no!)
I swore I wouldn't tell, but most of y'all sharing

bars
Like you got the bottom bunk in a two-man cell
(A two-man cell)
Something's in the water (Something's in the water)
And if I gotta brown-nose for some gold
Then I'd rather be a bum than a motherfuckin' baller

**[Chorus 1]**

Bitch, where you when I was walkin'? Now I run the game, got the whole world talkin'

---

**3. King Kunta**

Reference to **King Kunta**: a fictional slave whose foot was cut off for trying to escape.

Metaphor for the United States.

Reference to **Kunta Kinte**: a fictional slave whose foot was cut off for trying to escape.

**Produced by Sounwave; Additional production by Terrace Martin**

**Produced by Sounwave; Additional production by Terrace Martin**

Yams: something that can bring someone down, such as drugs and power. Also slang for heroin and cocaine.

Yams: something that can bring someone down, such as drugs and power. Also slang for heroin and cocaine.
**[Verse 1]**

King Kunta, everybody wanna cut the legs off
him
King Kunta, black man taking no losses, oh yeah
Bitch, where you when I was walkin’?
Now I run the game, got the whole world talkin’
King Kunta, everybody wanna cut the legs off
him
When you got the yams—(What’s the yams?)

**[Verse 2]**

The yam brought it out of Richard Pryor
Manipulated Bill Clinton with desires
24/7, 365 days times two
I was contemplatin’ gettin’ on stage
Just to go back to the hood, see my enemy, and say… (Oh yeah)

**[Chorus 1]**

Bitch, where you when I was walkin’?
Now I run the game, got the whole world talkin’
King Kunta, everybody wanna cut the legs off
him
King Kunta, black man taking no losses, oh yeah
Bitch, where you when I was walkin’?
Now I run the game, got the whole world talkin’
King Kunta, everybody wanna cut the legs off
him

**[Verse 3]**

You goat-mouth mammyfucker
I was gonna kill a couple rappers, but they did it
to themselves
Everybody’s suicidal, they ain’t even need my help
This shit is elementary, I’ll probably go to jail
If I shoot at your identity and bounce to the left
Stuck a flag in my city, everybody’s screamin’
“Compton!”
I should probably run for mayor when I’m done,
to be honest
And I put that on my momma and my baby boo too
Twenty million walkin’ out the court buildin’,
woo woo!
Aw yeah, fuck the judge, I made it past twenty-five, and there I was
A little nappy-headed nigga with the world behind him
Life ain’t shit but a fat vagina
Screamin’ “Annie, are you okay? Annie, are you okay?”
Limo tinted with the gold plates
Straight from the bottom, this the belly of the beast

Reference to Kunta Kinte: a fictional slave whose foot was cut off for trying to escape.

Reference to Kunta Kinte: a fictional slave whose foot was cut off for trying to escape.

Reference to Kunta Kinte: a fictional slave whose foot was cut off for trying to escape.

Yams: something that can bring someone down, such as drugs and power. Also slang for heroin and cocaine.

Richard Pryor and Bill Clinton both did deplorable things when they were under the influence.

The ghetto.

Reference to Kunta Kinte: a fictional slave whose foot was cut off for trying to escape.

Reference to Kunta Kinte: a fictional slave whose foot was cut off for trying to escape.

Reference to Kunta Kinte: a fictional slave whose foot was cut off for trying to escape.

A mammy is a black stereotype for a black woman who worked for a white family.

Justice system.
Shoot at black people.

Lamar’s birthplace: a ghetto.

Lines from Michael Jackson’s *Smooth Criminal.*
Jackson was an African American as well.

Reference to the fact that Lamar started out as a poor boy from the ghetto.
From a peasant to a prince to a motherfuckin' king (oh yeah)

[Chorus 2]
Bitch, where was you when I was walkin'—
{Gunshot}
By the time you hear the next pop
The funk shall be within you—{Gunshot}
Now I run the game, got the whole world talkin'
King Kunta, everybody wanna cut the legs off him

King Kunta, black man taking no losses, oh yeah
Bitch, where was you when I was walkin'? Now I run the game, got the whole world talkin'
King Kunta, everybody wanna cut the legs off him

[Outro]
(Fall, fall, fall, fall, fall, fall, fall, fall, fall, fall, fall)
We want the funk
We want the funk
(Now if I give you the funk, you gon' take it?)
We want the funk
(Now if I give you the funk, you gon' take it?)
We want the funk
(Now if I give you the funk, you gon' take it?)
We want the funk
(Do you want the funk?)
We want the funk
(Do you want the funk?)
We want the funk
(Now if I give you the funk, you gon' take it?)
We want the funk

[Poem]
I remember you was conflicted, misusing your influence

A metaphor for Lamar’s career.
Gun violence.
Gun violence.
Reference to Kunta Kinte: a fictional slave whose foot was cut off for trying to escape.
Reference to Kunta Kinte: a fictional slave whose foot was cut off for trying to escape.
The beginning of a poem that will unveil itself throughout the album.

4. Institutionalized
[Produced by Rahki & Tommy Black]

[Intro: Kendrick Lamar]
What money got to do with it
When I don't know the full definition of a rap image?
I'm trapped inside the ghetto and I ain't proud to admit it
Institutionalized, I keep runnin' back for a visit
Hol' up, get it back
I said I'm trapped inside the ghetto and I ain't proud to admit it

This song is about the institution of money.
Lamar is still haunted by his ghetto days.
He is still institutionalized by prison, and the racism and poverty of the ghetto.
Lamar is still haunted by his ghetto days.
Institutionalized, I could still kill me a nigga, so what?

[Interlude: Anna Wise and Bilal]
If I was the president
I'd pay my mama's rent
Free my homies and them
Bulletproof my Chevy doors
Lay in the White House and get high, Lord
Who ever thought?
Master, take the chains off me!

[Beat Change]

[Intro]
Zoom, zoom, zoom, zoom
Zoom, zoom, zoom
Zoom, zoom, zoom, zoom
Zoom, zoom, zoom
Zoom, zoom, zoom
Zoom, zoom, zoom, zoom
Zoom, zoom, zoom
[Beat Change]

[Verse 1: Kendrick Lamar]
Life to me, like a box of chocolate
Quid pro quo, somethin' for somethin', that's the obvious
Oh shit, flow's so sick, don't you swallow it
Bitin' my style, you're salmonella poison positive
I can just alleviate the rap industry politics
Milk the game up, never lactose intolerant
The last remainder of real shit, you know the obvious
Me, scholarship? No, streets put me through colleges
Be all you can be, true, but the problem is
Dream only a dream if work don't follow it
Remind me of the homies that used to know me, now follow this
I'll tell you my hypothesis, I'm probably just way too loyal
K Dizzle will do it for you, my niggas think I'm a god
Truthfully all of 'em spoiled, usually you're never charged
But somethin' came over you once I took you to them fuckin' BET Awards
You lookin' at artistses like they're harvestses
So many Rollies around you and you want all of them
Somebody told me you thinkin' 'bout snatchin' jewelry
I should've listened when my grandmama said to me
He could still do the things he used to do in the ghetto.

Reference to slavery.

Life is full of suprises.
Life is one big trade-off.

Lamar turns to the rap industry once again. He wants to weaken it.

The chance of getting into college is small when you grow up in the ghetto.
[Hook: Bilal]
Shit don't change until you get up and wash yo' ass, nigga
Shit don't change until you get up and wash yo' ass, boy
Shit don't change until you get up and wash yo' ass, nigga
Oh now, slow down

[Bridge: Snoop Dogg]
And once upon a time, in a city so divine
Called West Side Compton, there stood a little nigga
He was five foot something, God bless the kid
Took his homie to the show and this is what they said

[Verse 2: Kendrick Lamar]
Fuck am I 'posed to do when I'm lookin' at walkin' licks?
The constant big money talk 'bout the mansion and foreign whips
The private jets and passport, presidential glass floor
Gold bottles, gold models, givin' up the ass for Instagram flicks, suckin' dick, fuck is this?
One more sucker wavin' wit a flashy wrist
My defense mechanism tell me to get him quickly because he got it
It's a recession, then why the fuck he at King of Diamonds?
No more livin' poor, meet my four-four
When I see 'em, put the per diem on the floor
Now Kendrick, know they're your co-workers
But it's gon' take a lot 'fore this pistol go cold turkey
Now I can watch his watch on the TV and be okay
But see I'm on the clock once that watch landin' in LA
Remember steal from the rich and givin' it back to the poor?
Well, that's me at these awards
I guess my grandmama was warnin' a boy
She said...

[Hook: Bilal]
Shit don't change until you get up and wash yo' ass, nigga
Shit don't change until you get up and wash yo' ass, boy
Shit don't change until you get up and wash yo' ass, nigga
Oh now, slow down

Nothing changes until you do something about it.

Lamar’s lifestory.

The upsides of a rich and famous life.

Lamar developed a defense mechanism during his ghetto life. Even though he is now rich, he still feels the urge to defend himself sometimes.

He is now rich.

To stop with an addiction.

When he lived in the ghetto, he used to steal from the rich for the poor.
And once upon a time, in a city so divine
Called West Side Compton, there stood a little nigga
He was five foot something, dazed and confused
Talented but still under the neighborhood ruse
You can take your boy out the hood but you can't take the hood out the homie
Took his show money, stashed it in the mozey wozey
Hollywood's nervous
Fuck you, goodnight, thank you much for your service

Lamar’s lifestory.
The ghosts of ghetto’s past will forever haunt him.
Allusion to the military.

5. These Walls

[Intro: Kendrick Lamar & Anna Wise]
I remember you was conflicted, misusing your influence
Sometimes, I did the same
(Woman Moaning)
If these walls could talk
If these walls could talk
If these walls could talk
If these walls could talk
If these walls could talk
If these walls could talk
If these walls could talk
Sex

[Bridge: Anna Wise & Kendrick Lamar]
She just want to close her eyes and sweat
With you, with you, with you
Exercise her right to work it out
It's true, it's true, it's true
Shout out to the birthday girls, say hey (Hey), say hey (Hey)
(Ah, girl)
Everyone deserves a night to play (Play)
She plays, only when you tell her no

[Hook: Anna Wise, Thundercat & Bilal]
If these walls could talk
I can feel your reign when it cries, gold lives inside of you
If these walls could talk
I love it when I’m in it, I love it when I’m in it

[Verse 1: Kendrick Lamar]
If these walls could talk, they’d tell me to swim
good
No boat, I float better than he would
No life jacket, I’m not the God of Nazareth
But your flood can be misunderstood
Walls telling me they full of pain, resentment
Need someone to live in them just to relieve tension
Me, I’m just a tenant
Landlord said these walls vacant more than a
minute
These walls are vulnerable, exclamation
Interior pink, color coordinated
I interrogated every nook and cranny
I mean, it's still amazing, before they couldn’t stand me
These walls want to cry tears
These walls happier when I’m here
These walls never could hold up
Every time I come around, demolition might crush

[Hook: Anna Wise, Thundercat & Bilal]
If these walls could talk
I can feel your reign when it cries, gold lives inside of you
If these walls could talk
I love it when I’m in it, I love it when I’m in it

[Verse 2: Kendrick Lamar]
If these walls could talk, they’d tell me to go deep
Yelling at me continuously, I can see
Your defense mechanism is my decision
Knock these walls down, that’s my religion
Walls feeling like they ready to close in
I suffocate, then catch my second wind
I resonate in these walls
I don’t know how long I can wait in these walls
I’ve been on the streets too long
Looking at you from the outside in
They sing the same old song
About how they walls always the cleanest
I beg to differ, I must’ve missed them
I’m not involved, I’d rather diss ’em
I’d rather call on you, put your wall up
’Cause when I come around, demolition gon’ crush

[Hook: Anna Wise, Thundercat & Bilal]
If these walls could talk
I can feel your reign when it cries, gold lives inside of you
If these walls could talk
I love it when I’m in it, I love it when I’m in it

Walls are a recurring metaphor for the walls of a prison cell, the walls in your head, and the walls of a vagina.
He is only having sex with her temporarily until her husband/baby daddy returns.

He is sad: the walls in his head want to cry.
He is going to collapse. He is not strong anymore.

Lamar feels like he is stuck within the walls. It is a suffocating feeling.
[Instrumental Break]

[Verse 3: Kendrick Lamar]
If your walls could talk, they’d tell you it’s too late
Your destiny, accept it, your fate
Burn accessories and stash them where they are
Take the recipe, the Bible and God
Wall telling you that commissary is low
Race wars happening, no calling CO
No calling your mother to save you
Homies to say you’re irrepetible, not acceptable
Your behavior is Sammy the Bull like
A killer that turned snitch
Walls is telling me you a bitch
You pray for appeals hoping the warden would afford them
That sentence so important
Walls telling you to listen to "Sing About Me"
Retaliation is strong, you even dream ’bout me
Killed my homeboy and God spared your life
Dumb criminal got indicted same night
So when you play this song, rewind the first verse
About me abusing my power so you can hurt
About me and her in the shower whenever she’s horny
About me and her in the after hours of the morning
About her baby daddy currently serving life
And how she think about you until we meet up at night
About the only girl that cared about you when you asked her
And how she fucking on a famous rapper
Walls could talk
(Talk)

[Poem: Kendrick Lamar]
I remember you was conflicted
Misusing your influence
Sometimes I did the same
Abusing my power, full of resentment
Resentment that turned into a deep depression
Found myself screaming in a hotel room

He turns to the man in jail: he is too late.
The man is in jail.
Sammy the Bull is a nickname for someone who “snitches”.
The man turns out to have killed Lamar’s friend. He is now having sex with the man’s girlfriend as an act of revenge.
The poem continues. He resents some of the things he has done.

6. u
[Produced by Taz Arnold & Whoarei;
Additional production by Sounwave]
{Screams}
[Hook: Kendrick Lamar]
Loving you is complicated, loving you is complicated
Loving you is complicated, loving you is complicated
Loving you is complicated, loving you is complicated
Loving you is complicated, loving you is complicated
Loving you is complicated, loving you is complicated
Loving you is complicated, loving you is complicated
Loving you is complicated, loving you is complicated

[Verse 1: Kendrick Lamar]
I place blame on you still, place shame on you still
Feel like you ain't shit, feel like you don't feel
Confidence in yourself, breakin' on marble floors
Watchin' anonymous strangers, tellin' me that I'm yours
But you ain't shit, I'm convinced your tolerance nothin' special
What can I blame you for? Nigga, I can name several
Situations, I'll start with your little sister bakin' a baby inside, just a teenager, where your patience? Where was your antennas? Where was the influence you speak of? You preached in front of 100,000 but never reached her
I fuckin' tell you, you fuckin' failure—you ain't no leader!
I never liked you, forever despise you—I don't need you!
The world don't need you, don't let them deceive you
Numbers lie too, fuck your pride too, that's for dedication
Thought money would change you Made you more complacent
I fuckin' hate you, I hope you embrace it I swear—

Lamar’s teen sister is pregnant.

Lamar feels like he is a failure.

Depressed thoughts.
[Bridge: Kendrick Lamar]
Lolin' you, lovin' you, not lovin' you, 100°
proof
(I can feel your vibe and recognize that you're ashamed of me
Yes, I hate you, too)

[Break: Jessica Vielmas]
(Loving you ain't really complicated)
House keeping, house keeping
(What I got to do to get to you?)
¡Abre la puerta! ¡Abre la puerta tengo que limpiar el cuarto!
(To you)
¡Es que no hay mucho tiempo tengo que limpiar el cuarto!
(To you)
¡Disculpe!
(What I got to do to get to you?)
(To you)

[Verse 2]
You the reason why mama and them leavin'
No, you ain't shit, you say you love them
I know you don't mean it
I know you're irresponsible, selfish, in denial,
can't help it
Your trials and tribulations a burden, everyone felt it
Everyone heard it, multiple shots, corners cryin'
You was deserted, where was your antennas again?
Where was your presence?
Where was your support that you pretend?
You ain’t no brother, you ain’t no disciple
You ain’t no friend
A friend never leave Compton for profit
Or leave his best friend, little brother
You promised you’d watch him before they shot him
Where was your antennas?
On the road, bottles and bitches
You FaceTimed him one time, that's unforgiving
You even FaceTimed instead of a hospital visit
Guess you thought he would recover well
Third surgery, they couldn't stop the bleeding for real
Then he died, God himself will say, "You fuckin' failed"
You ain't try

[Verse 3]
I know your secrets, nigga
He is ashamed of himself and hates himself.

The Spanish lyrics hint at the multiculturalism of the ghetto.

He is haunted by guilt because he did not visit his friend who later died in hospital.

He blames himself for the fact that his mother is leaving him.

Trials in court.

Gun violence.

Ghetto.
Mood swings is frequent, nigga
I know depression is restin' on your heart for
two reasons, nigga
I know you and a couple block boys ain't been
 speakin', nigga
Y'all damn near beefin', I see it and you're the
reason, nigga
And if this bottle could talk—gulp—I cry myself
to sleep
Bitch, everything is your fault
Faults breakin' to pieces, earthquakes on every
weekend
Because you shook as soon as you knew
confinement was needed
I know your secrets, don't let me tell them to the
world
About that shit you thinkin'
And that time you—gulp—I'm 'bout to hurl
I'm fucked up, but I ain't as fucked up as you
You just can't get right, I think your heart made
of bullet proof
Should've killed yo' ass a long time ago
You should've feeled that black revolver blast a
long time ago
And if those mirrors could talk it'd say, "You
gotta go"
And if I told your secrets
The world'll know money can't stop a suicidal
weakness
Lamar is depressed.
Fighting.
He seeks for redemption in alcohol.
He seeks for redemption in alcohol.
Lamar is contemplating suicide.

7. Alright
[Produced by Pharrell Williams & Sounwave]
[Directed by Colin Tilley]

[Intro: Kendrick Lamar]
Alls my life I has to fight, nigga
Alls my life I...
Hard times like, "God!"
Bad trips like, "Yeah!"
Nazareth, I'm fucked up
Homie, you fucked up
But if God got us, then we gon' be alright

[Hook: Pharrell Williams]
Nigga, we gon' be alright
Nigga, we gon' be alright
We gon' be alright
Do you hear me, do you feel me? We gon' be alright
Nigga, we gon' be alright
Huh? We gon' be alright
Nigga, we gon' be alright

Being an African American, Lamar has had to
fight for his right all of his life.

Everything will be okay.
Everything will be okay.
He wants the black population to hear it:
everything will be okay.
Do you hear me, do you feel me? We gon' be alright

[Verse 1: Kendrick Lamar]
Uh, and when I wake up
I recognize you're looking at me for the pay cut
But homicide be looking at you from the face down
What MAC-11 even boom with the bass down?
Schemin', and let me tell you 'bout my life
Painkillers only put me in the twilight
Where pretty pussy and Benjamin is the highlight
Now tell my momma I love her, but this what I like, Lord knows
Twenty of 'em in my Chevy, tell 'em all to come and get me
Reaping everything I sow, so my karma comin' heavy

No preliminary hearings on my record
I'm a motherfucking gangster in silence for the record
Tell the world I know it's too late
Boys and girls, I think I gone cray
Drown inside my vices all day
Won't you please believe when I say

[Pre-Hook: Kendrick Lamar]
Wouldn't you know
We been hurt, been down before
Nigga, when our pride was low
Lookin' at the world like, "Where do we go?"
Nigga, and we hate po-po
Wanna kill us dead in the street fo sho'
Nigga, I'm at the preacher's door
My knees gettin' weak, and my gun might blow
But we gon' be alright

[Hook: Pharrell Williams]
Nigga, we gon' be alright
Nigga, we gon' be alright
We gon' be alright
Do you hear me, do you feel me? We gon' be alright
Nigga, we gon' be alright
Huh? We gon' be alright
Nigga, we gon' be alright
Do you hear me, do you feel me? We gon' be alright

[Verse 2: Kendrick Lamar]
What you want you: a house or a car?
Forty acres and a mule? A piano, a guitar?
Anything, see my name is Lucy, I'm your dog
Motherfucker, you can live at the mall

People are earning less and he is blamed for it.
They should be aware of the fact that they can be killed anytime.
A gun.
Drugs.

Problems with justice.
Gang violence.

It is too late for Lamar. He suggest he should just do immoral things all day.
But……

African Americans have been hurt many times before and they have faced times at which they thought they could no longer take it anymore.
Hate against the police.
He is sure the police is out to kill black people.
He might shoot back.
But everything is going to be okay.
Everything is going to be okay.
He wants the black population to hear it: everything will be okay.

Refers t an agrarian deal offered to ex-slaves.
Lucifer: the devil. Alludes to America.
Capitalism.
I can see the evil, I can tell it, I know it's illegal
I don't think about it, I deposit every other zero
Thinking of my partner, put the candy, paint it
on the Regal
Digging in my pocket, ain't a profit big enough
to feed you
Every day my logic get another dollar just to
keep you
In the presence of your chico... Ah!
I don't talk about it, be about it, every day I
sequel
If I got it then you know you got it, Heaven, I
can reach you
Pet dog, pet dog, pet dog, my dog, that's all
Pick back and chat, I trap the back for y'all
I rap, I black on track so rest assured
My rights, my wrongs; I write 'til I'm right with
God

[Pre-Hook: Kendrick Lamar]
Wouldn't you know
We been hurt, been down before
Nigga, when our pride was low
Lookin' at the world like, "Where do we go?"
Nigga, and we hate po-po
Wanna kill us dead in the street fo sho'
Nigga, I'm at the preacher's door
My knees gettin' weak, and my gun might blow
But we gon' be alright

[Hook: Pharrell Williams]
Nigga, we gon' be alright
Nigga, we gon' be alright
We gon' be alright
Do you hear me, do you feel me? We gon' be
alright
Nigga, we gon' be alright
Huh? We gon' be alright
Nigga, we gon' be alright
Do you hear me, do you feel me? We gon' be
alright

[Outro: Kendrick Lamar]
I keep my head up high
I cross my heart and hope to die
Lovin' me is complicated
Too afraid, a lot of changes
I'm alright, and you're a favorite
Dark nights in my prayers

[Poem]
I remembered you was conflicted
Misusing your influence, sometimes I did the
same
Abusing my power, full of resentment
Evil, devil, etc.
He does not have enough money to pay for food.
He is positive he van make it to heaven.
He wants to rap, write, and admit his sins until
God will accept him into His Kingdom.
African Americans have been hurt many times
before and they have faced times at which they
thought they could no longer take it anymore.
Hate against the police.
He is sure the police is out to kill black people.
He might shoot back.
But everything is going to be okay.
Everything is going to be okay.
He wants the black population to hear it:
everything will be okay.
He wants to stay positive.
Or he wants to die.
The poem continues. Lamar resents some of the
things he has done. It gave him a deep and dark
depression. But he wants to rise up again: he
does not want to commit suicide, but he wants to
Resentment that turned into a deep depression
   Found myself screamin’ in the hotel room
   I didn’t wanna self-destruct
   The evils of Lucy was all around me
   So I went runnin’ for answers

make it better. He wants to find answers to solve his problem.

8. For Sale? (Interlude)

[Intro: Bilal]
Oh, oh, oh, ohhhh, ohh
Oh, oh, oh, ohhhh, ohh, ohh
(Breathing)
What's wrong, nigga?
I thought you was keeping it gangsta
I thought this what you wanted
They say if you scared, go to church
But remember, he knows the Bible too

This section suggests Lamar is doubting his career.

[Hook]
Now, baby, when I get you, get you, get you, get you
I'ma go hit the throttle with you
Smoking, lokin', poking that doja 'til I'm idle
'Cause I (want you)

Slang term for marijuana.

Now, baby, when I'm riding here, I'm riding dirty
Registration is out of service
Smoking, lokin', drinking that potion, you can see me swerving
'Cause I (want you)
(I need you more than you know)

Temptation is a main theme in this song. The devil is one of these temptations.

[Verse 1: Kendrick Lamar]
I remember you took me to the mall last week, baby
You looked me in my eyes about four, five times
Til I was hypnotized, then you clarified
That I (want you)
You said Sherane ain't got nothing on Lucy
I said, "You crazy?"
Roses are red, violets are blue
But me and you both pushing up daisies if I (want you)

Capitalism.

[Bridge]
Now, baby, when I get you, get you, get you, get you
I'ma go hit the throttle with you
Smoking, lokin', poking that doja 'til I'm idle
'Cause I (want you)

Marijuana.

[Verse 2: Kendrick Lamar]

Temptation.
You said to me
You said your name was Lucy
I said, "Where's Ricardo?"
You said, "Oh, no, not the show"
Then you spit a little rap to me like this
When I turned twenty-six, I was like, "Oh, shit"
You said to me
I remember what you said too, you said
"My name is Lucy, Kendrick
You introduced me, Kendrick
Usually I don’t do this
But I see you and me, Kendrick
Lucy give you no worries
Lucy got million stories
About these rappers that I came after when they was boring
Lucy gon’ fill your pockets
Lucy gon’ move your mama out of Compton
Inside the gi-gantic mansion like I promised
Lucy just want your trust and loyalty
Avoiding me?
It’s not so easy, I’m at these functions accordingly
Kendrick, Lucy don’t slack a minute
Lucy work harder
Lucy gon’ call you even when Lucy know you love your Father
I’m Lucy
I loosely heard prayers on your first album, truly
Lucy don’t mind, 'cause at the end of the day you'll pursue me
Lucy go get it, Lucy not timid, Lucy up front
Lucy got paperwork on top of paperwork
I want you to know that Lucy got you
All your life I watched you
And now you all grown up to sign this contract, if that’s possible"

[Hook]
Now, baby, when I get you, get you, get you, get you
I'ma go hit the throttle with you
Smoking, lokin’, poking that doja ’til I'm idle with you
’Cause I (want you)
Now, baby, when I'm riding here, I'm riding dirty
Registration is out of service
Smoking, lokin’, drinking that potion, you can see me swerving
’Cause I (want you)

[Poem]
I remembered you was conflicted

Lucifer, the devil.

This entire section talks about all the temptations Lucifer offers Lamar: money, a mansion for his mother, a career, a contract, etc.
Misusing your influence, sometimes I did the same
Abusing my power full of resentment
Resentment that turned into a deep depression
Found myself screamin' in the hotel room
I didn't wanna self destruct
The evils of Lucy was all around me
So I went runnin' for answers
Until I came home

[Produced by Taz Arnold; Additional production by Sounwave & Terrace Martin]

depression. But he wants to rise up again: he does not want to commit suicide, but he wants to make it better. He wants to find answers to solve his problem. But something happened when he returned home to Compton (and himself)…

9. Momma

The song is called “Momma” because Lamar’s mother asked him to return to Compton to tell the children his story. Little did he know the children were going to remind him of his roots.

[Produced by Knxwledge & Taz Arnold]

[Intro]
Oh shit!
I need that
(So it's free)
I need that sloppy
That sloppy
Like a Chevy in quicksand
(So it's free)
Yeah, that sloppy

[Verse 1]
This feelin' is unmatched
This feelin' is brought to you by adrenaline and good rap
Black Pendleton ball cap
(West, west, west)
We don't share the same synonym, fall back
(West, west, west)
Been in it before internet had new acts
Mimicking radio's nemesis made me wack
My innocence limited the experience lacked
Ten of us with no tentative tactic that cracked
The mind of a literate writer, but I did it in fact
You admitted it once I submitted it wrapped in plastic
Remember scribblin', scratchin' dilligent sentences backwards
Visiting freestyle cyphers for your reaction
Now I can live in a stadium, pack it the fastest
Gamblin' Benjamin benefits, sinnin' in traffic
Spinnin' women in cartwheels, linen fabric on fashion
Winnin' in every decision

This verse is all about Kendrick’s rapping potentials and how happy it makes him.

One of the core elements of hip hop.

Kendrick has mastered the art of hip hop.
Isn't it lovely how menaces turned attraction?  
Pivotin' rappers, finish your fraction while writing blue magic  
Thank God for rap, I would say it got me a plaque  
But what's better than that?  
The fact it brought me back home

[Hook]  
We been waitin' for you  
Waitin' for you  
Waitin' for you  
Waitin' for you  
(So it's free)

[Verse 2]  
I know everything  
I know everything, know myself  
I know morality, spirituality, good and bad health  
I know fatality might haunt you  
I know everything, I know Compton  
I know street shit, I know shit that's conscious  
I know everything, I know lawyers, advertisement and sponsors  
I know wisdom, I know bad religion, I know good karma  
I know everything, I know history  
I know the universe works mentally  
I know the perks of bullshit isn't meant for me  
I know everything, I know cars, clothes, hoes, and money  
I know loyalty, I know respect, I know those that's ornery  
I know everything, the highs, the lows, the groupies, the junkies  
I know if I'm generous at heart, I don't need recognition  
The way I'm rewarded, well, that's God's decision  
I know you know that line's for Compton School District  
Just give it to the kids, don’t gossip 'bout how it was distributed  
I know how people work  
I know the price of life, I'm knowin' how much it’s worth  
I know what I know and I know it well not to ever forget  
Until I realized I didn’t know shit  
The day I came home

Kendrick is happy that rap crossed his path, because it brought him home to realize what happens in the next verses.

In this verse, Kendrick Lamar talks about all the knowledge he has, ranging from knowledge about hood life to famous life.

But when Kendrick returned to Compton, he found out he did not really know anything…
Waitin’ for you
Waitin’ for you
(So it’s free)

[Verse 3]
I met a little boy that resembled my features
Nappy afro, gap in his smile
Hand-me-down sneakers bounced through the crowd
Run a number on man and woman that crossed him
Sun beamin’ on his beady beads, exhausted
Tossin’ footballs with his ashy black ankles
Breakin’ new laws, mama passed on home trainin’
He looked at me and said, "Kendrick, you do
know my language
You just forgot because of what public schools
had painted
Oh, I forgot, 'Don't Kill My Vibe', that's right,
you're famous
I used to watch on Channel 5, TV was taken
But never mind, you're here right now, don't you
mistake it
It's just a new trip
Take a glimpse at your family's ancestor
Make a new list
Of everything you thought was progress
And that was bullshit
I mean, your life is full of turmoil
Spoiled by fantasies of who you are, I feel bad
for you
I can attempt
To enlighten you without frightenin’ you
If you resist
I'll back off quick, go catch a flight or two
But if you pick
Destiny over rest in peace
Then be an advocate
Tell your homies especially
To come back home"

[Interlude]
This is a world premiere
This is a world premiere
This is a world premiere

[Outro]
I been lookin’ for you my whole life, an appetite
For the feeling I can barely describe, where you reside?
Is it in a woman, is it in money, or mankind?
Tell me something got me losing my mind, ah!
You make me wanna jump

In Compton, Kendrick meets a little African American boy. This boy reminds him of what Kendrick used to be and what he has become. The boy urges Lamar to be an advocate for the people in Compton and to ask his friends (other rappers) to do the same.

Kendrick asks himself where he can re-find himself.
Jump, jump, jump, jump
Let's talk about love
Jump, jump, jump, jump
Let's talk about love
Jump, jump, jump, jump
Let's talk about love
Jump, jump, jump, jump
Let's talk about love

I been lookin' for you my whole life, an appetite
For the feeling I can barely describe, where you reside?
Is it in a woman, is it in money, or mankind?
Tell me something think I'm losing my mind, ah!
I say where you at, from the front to the back
I'm lookin' for you I react, only when you react
Ah, I thought I found you, back in the ghetto
When I was seventeen with the .38 Special
Maybe you're in a dollar bill, maybe you're not real
Maybe only the wealthy get to know how you feel
Maybe I'm paranoid, ha, maybe I don't need you anyway
Don't lie to me, I'm suicidal any day
I can be your advocate
I can preach for you if you tell me what the matter is...

Kendrick asks himself where he can re-find himself.

Ghetto.
He was seventeen and had a revolver.
He questions if he can find himself in money.

He makes a promise to the boy that he is going to be an advocate.

10. Hood Politics
[Produced by Tae Beast, Sounwave & Thundercat]

[ Intro]
K-Dot, pick up the phone, nigga
Every time I call, it's going to voicemail
Don't tell me they got you on some weirdo rap shit, nigga?
No socks and skinny jeans and shit, ha
Ha-ha-ha-ha-ha-ha-ha-ha-ha-ha-ha-ha-ha-ha
Call me on Shaniqua's phone!

[Hook: Kendrick Lamar]
I been A-1 since day one, you niggas boo boo
Your home boy, your block that you're from,
booo boo
Lil hoes you went to school with, boo boo
Baby mama and your new bitch, boo boo
We was in the hood, 14 with the deuce-deuce
14 years later going hard, like we used to on the dead homies
On the dead homies

K-Dot was Lamar’s former rapper name. The fact that he cannot reach K-Dot may suggest that the old Kendrick is gone.

Here, Kendrick contrasts his life as a child with those of the others in Compton. His life was good since the beginning, while others had “boo boo”-lives, which is a slang term for poop.

A weapon.

There were dead people in the ghetto.
He does not want to talk about politics in rap, because there are worse things in life. His friend was killed, for example.

The ghetto.

Here, Kendrick contrasts his life as a child with those of the others in Compton. His life was good since the beginning, while others had “boo boo”-lives, which is a slang term for poop.

A weapon.

There were dead people in the ghetto.

He describes a gang scene from when he was younger.

Mi barrio is Spanish for the ghetto.

When people want to threaten the ghetto, they can better start running, because the ghetto will come after them.

Los Angeles Police Department.
Niggas names on paper, you snitched all summer
Streets don’t fail me now, they tell me it’s a new gang in town
From Compton to Congress, set trippin’ all around
Ain’t nothin’ new, but a flu of new Demo-Crips
Red state versus a blue state, which one you governin’?
They give us guns and drugs, call us thugs
Make it they promise to fuck with you
No condom, they fuck with you, Obama say, “What it do?”

[Interlude]
Obama say, "What it do?"
Obama say, "What it do?"
Obama say, "What it do?"

[Hook: Kendrick Lamar]
I been A-1 since day one, you niggas boo boo
Your home boy, your block that you’re from, boo boo
Lil hoes you went to school with, boo boo
Baby mama and your new bitch, boo boo
We was in the hood, 14 with the deuce-deuce
14 years later going hard, like we used to on the dead homies

[Verse 3: Kendrick Lamar]
Everybody want to talk about who this and who that
Who the realest and who wack, or who white or who black
Critics want to mention that they miss when hip-hop was rappin’
Motherfucker, if you did, then Killer Mike’d be platinum
Y’all priorities fucked up, put energy in wrong shit
Hennessy and Crown Vic, my memory been gone since
Don’t ask about no camera blocking at award shows
No, don’t ask about my bitch, no, don’t ask about my Vogues
’Less you askin’ me about power, yeah, I got a lot of it
I’m the only nigga next to Snoop that can push the button
Had the Coast on standby
“K. Dot, what up? I heard they opened up Pandora’s box”

This section comments on the US government. Kendrick tackles the hypocrisy of the government, as they influenced by corrupt lobbyists. The terms “Demo-Crips and Re-Blood-licans” are a reference to a book that compares the government to gangs. Kendrick once again comments on the hypocrisy of the government and how they blame black people for participating in gang violence, while the government allows people to sell weapons. The condom refers to ’no protection’ of black people. Lamar is critical of president Obama as well, because he still remains a politician.

Here, Kendrick contrasts his life as a child with those of the others in Compton. His life was good since the beginning, while others had “boo boo”-lives, which is a slang term for poop.

A weapon.

There were dead people in the ghetto.

Lamar returns to the rap industry, where he is constantly judged.

Lamar cannot remember a day/night that seems to have involved liquor and the police.

Popularity.
I box ‘em all in, by a landslide
Nah homie we too sensitive, it spill out to the streets
I make the call and get the coast involved then
history repeats
But I resolved inside that private hall while
sitting down with Jay
He said "it's funny how one verse could fuck up the game"

[Hook]
I been A-1 since day one, you niggas boo boo-

[Poem: Kendrick Lamar]
I remember you was conflicted
Misusing your influence
Sometimes I did the same
Abusing my power full of resentment
Resentment that turned into a deep depression
Found myself screaming in a hotel room
I didn't want to self-destruct
The evils of Lucy was all around me
So I went running for answers
Until I came home
But that didn't stop survivors guilt
Going back and forth
Trying to convince myself the stripes I earned
Or maybe how A-1 my foundation was
But while my loved ones was fighting
A continuous war back in the city
I was entering a new one

Jay-Z, an African American rapper.

Here, Kendrick contrasts his life as a child with those of the others in Compton.

The poem continues. Lamar resents some of the things he has done. It gave him a deep and dark depression. But he wants to rise up again: he does not want to commit suicide, but he wants to make it better. He wants to find answers to solve his problem. But something happened when he returned home to Compton (and himself). He found his answers, but that did not stop him from feeling guilty about his career. He had to convince himself he had earned it. But while his family and friends were still struggling in the ghetto, he encountered another kind of fight: a fight with himself.

11. How Much a Dollar Cost
[Produced by LoveDragon]
[Verse 1: Kendrick Lamar]
How much a dollar really cost?
The question is detrimental, paralyzin' my thoughts
Parasites in my stomach keep me with a gut feeling, y'all
Gotta see how I’m chillin’ once I park this luxury car
Hopping out feeling big as Mutombo "20 on pump 6," dirty Marcellus called me Dumbo
20 years ago, can't forget
Now I can lend him a ear or two
How to stack these residuals tenfold
The liberal concept of what men’ll do
"20 on 6," he didn't hear me
Indigenous African only spoke Zulu
My American tongue was slurry

What is the value of money? This is a very important question.

This is where the story starts: Lamar parks his car at a gas station in South Africa.

He asks the pump attendant to fill his car for 20 (dollars) on pump 6.

The attendant is confused. Lamar thinks it has to do with language, but the problem is actually that 20 Rand is only 2 US dollars.
Walked out the gas station
A homeless man with a semi-tan complexion
Asked me for ten rand, stressin' about dry land
Deep water, powder blue skies that crack open
A piece of crack that he wanted, I knew he was smokin'
He begged and pleaded
Asked me to feed him twice, I didn't believe it
Told him, "Beat it"
Contributin' money just for his pipe, I couldn't see it
He said, "My son, temptation is one thing that I've defeated"
Listen to me, I want a single bill from you
Nothin' less, nothin' more"
I told him "I ain't have it" and closed my door
Tell me how much a dollar cost

[Chorus: James Fauntleroy]
It's more to feed your mind
Water, sun and love, the one you love
All you need, the air you breathe

[Verse 2: Kendrick Lamar]
He's starin' at me in disbelief
My temper is buildin', he's starin' at me, I grab my key
He's starin' at me, I started the car, then I tried to leave
And somethin' told me to keep it in park until I could see
The reason why he was mad at a stranger
Like I was supposed to save him
Like I'm the reason he's homeless and askin' me for a favor
He's starin' at me, his eyes followed me with no laser
He's starin' at me, I notice that his stare is contagious
'Cause now I'm starin' back at him, feelin' some type of disrespect
If I could throw a bat at him, it'd be aimin' at his neck
I never understood someone beggin' for goods
Askin' for handouts, takin' it if they could
And this particular person just had it down pat
Starin' at me for the longest until he finally asked
"Have you ever opened up Exodus 14? A humble man is all that we ever need
Tell me how much a dollar cost"

[Chorus: James Fauntleroy]
It's more to feed your mind
Water, sun and love, the one you love

Next, a colored homeless man walks out of the gas station, asking Lamar for money. Lamar lies and tells the man to leave because he has no money.

What is money worth?

The only thing you really need is air, not money.

The story continues. The man keeps asking Lamar for money, but Lamar ignores him. Eventually, the man asks Lamar if he has ever read the Bible, and the part about the humble Moses in particular.

What is money worth?
All you need, the air you breathe

[Verse 3: Kendrick Lamar]
Guilt trippin' and feelin' resentment
I never met a transient that demanded attention
They got me frustrated, indecisive and power trippin'
Sour emotions got me lookin' at the universe different
I should distance myself, I should keep it relentless
My selfishness is what got me here, who the fuck I'm kiddin'?
So I'mma tell you like I told the last bum
Crumbs and pennies, I need all of mines
And I recognize this type of panhandlin' all the time
I got better judgement, I know when nigga's hustlin', keep in mind
When I was strugglin', I did compromise, now I comprehend
I smell Grandpa's old medicine, reekin' from your skin
Moonshine and gin, nigga you're babblin', your words ain't flatterin'
I'm imaginin' Denzel but lookin' at O'Neal
Kazaam is sad thrills, your gimmick is mediocre
The jig is up, I seen you from a mile away losin' focus
And I'm insensitive, and I lack empathy
He looked at me and said, "Your potential is bittersweet"
I looked at him and said, "Every nickel is mines to keep"
He looked at me and said, "Know the truth, it'll set you free
You're lookin' at the Messiah, the son of Jehovah, the higher power
The choir that spoke the word, the Holy Spirit
The nerve of Nazareth, and I'll tell you just how much a dollar cost
The price of having a spot in Heaven, embrace your loss. I am God"

[Outro: Ronald Isley]
I washed my hands, I said my grace
What more do you want from me?
Tears of a clown, guess I'm not all what it's all meant to be
Shades of grey will never change if I condone
Turn this page, help me change to right my wrongs

The only thing you really need is air, not money.

Lamar starts to feel guilty.

But he wants to keep the money, because he made it himself.

He has always been selfish: it is what made him famous.

This section contains the big reveal: the homeless man turns out to be God. God finally explains the value of money to Lamar: it has cost Lamar his spot in Heaven.

Lamar prays for forgiveness.
12. Complexion (A Zulu Love)

[Produced by Thundercat & Sounwave; Additional production by Terrace Martin & Antydote]

[Intro]
(I'm with this)

[Hook: (Pete Rock)]
Complexion (two-step)
Complexion don't mean a thing (it's a Zulu love)
Complexion (two-step)
It all feels the same (it's a Zulu love)

[Verse 1: Kendrick Lamar]
Dark as the midnight hour or bright as the mornin' sun
Give a fuck about your complexion, I know what the Germans done
Sneak (dissin')
Sneak me through the back window, I'm a good field nigga
I made a flower for you outta cotton just to chill with you
You know I'd go the distance, you know I'm ten toes down
Even if master listenin', cover your ears, he 'bout to mention

[Verse 2: Kendrick Lamar]
Dark as the midnight hour, I'm bright as the mornin' sun
Brown skinned, but your blue eyes tell me your mama can't run
Sneak (dissin')
Sneak me through the back window, I'm a good field nigga
I made a flower for you outta cotton just to chill with you
You know I'd go the distance, you know I'm ten toes down
Even if master's listenin', I got the world's attention
So I'ma say somethin' that's vital and critical for survival
Of mankind, if he lyin', color should never rival beauty
Beauty is what you make it, I used to be so mistaken

The color of your skin does not define you as a person. We are all the same. Zulu refers to Ubuntu, in which everyone is loved regardless of skin color.

It does not matter if you are black or white.

A reference to WWII, in which Adolf Hitler wanted to get rid of people who were not white with blonde hair and blue eyes.

A slave (field slaves had extra dark skin). Cotton is a reference to slavery.

Master is a reference to slavery.

The color of your skin does not define you as a person. We are all the same. Zulu refers to Ubuntu, in which everyone is loved regardless of skin color.

It does not matter if you are black or white.

A slave (field slaves had extra dark skin). Cotton is a reference to slavery.

Master is a reference to slavery.

Kendrick Lamar gives the listener a survival tip: do not pay attention to skin color. Beauty is a societal convention.
By different shades of faces
Then Whit told me, "A woman is woman, love
the creation"
It all came from God, then you was my confirmation
I came to where you reside
And looked around to see more sights for sore eyes
Let the Willie Lynch theory reverse a million times with...

[Hook: (Pete Rock)]
Complexion (two-step)
Complexion don't mean a thing (it's a Zulu love)
Oh, Complexion (two-step)
It all feels the same (it's a Zulu love)

[Interlude]
You like it, I love it
You like it, I love it
You like it, I love it
You like it, I love it
You like it, I love it
You like it, I love it
You like it, I love it
You like it, I love it
(Where the homegirl Rapsody at?
I need you to speak your mind real quick, loved one!)

[Verse 3: Rapsody]
Let me talk my Stu Scott, 'scuse me on my 2Pac
Keep your head up, when did you stop loving thy
Color of your skin? Color of your eyes
That's the real blues, baby, like you met Jay's baby
You blew me away, you think more beauty in blue, green and grey
All my solemn men up north, 12 years a slave
12 years of age, thinkin' my shade too dark
I love myself, I no longer need Cupid
Enforcin' my dark side like a young George Lucas
Light don't mean you smart, bein' dark don't make you stupid
And frame of mind for them bustas, ain't talkin' "Woo-hah!"
Need a paradox for the pair of doc's they tutored
Like two Todds, L-L, you lose two times
If you don't see you beautiful in your complexion
It ain't complex to put it in context
Find the air beneath the kite, that's the context
Yeah, baby, I'm conscious, ain't no contest

Different skin colors.
Lamar’s girlfriend told him some wise words: love everyone, because they all come from the same God.

In the Willie Lynch theory, masters pit slaves against one another by grouping them in different skin colors.

The color of your skin does not define you as a person. We are all the same. Zulu refers to Ubuntu, in which everyone is loved regardless of skin color.

Two celebrities with two different skin colors. People should not stop loving the color of their skin because of societal beauty norms.

12 years a slave is a slave narrative.
Young people think Lamar is too dark, because that is what they are being taught. Lamar still loves himself.

A comment on stereotypes.

Lamar urges people to see their (black) skin color as something beautiful. It is not hard to do so.

Skin color is not a contest.
If you like it, I love it, all your earth tones been blessed
Ain’t no stress, jiggaboos wanna be
I ain’t talkin' Jay, I ain’t talkin' Bey
I’m talkin’ days we got school watchin' movie screens
And spike your self esteem
The new James Bond gon’ be black as me
Black as brown, hazelnut, cinnamon, black tea
And it’s all beautiful to me
Call your brothers magnificent, call all the sisters queens
We all on the same team, blues and pirus, no colors ain’t a thing
[Outro: Kendrick Lamar]
Barefoot babies with no cares
Teenage gun toters that don’t play fair, should I get out the car?
I don’t see Compton, I see something much worse
The land of the landmines, the hell that’s on earth

13. The Blacker the Berry
[Produced by Boi-1da & Koz]

[Intro]
Everything black, I don't want black (They want us to bow)
I want everything black, I ain't need black (Down to our knees)
Some white, some black, I ain't mean black (And pray to a God)
I want everything black (That we don't believe)
Everything black, want all things black
I don't need black, want everything black
Don't need black, our eyes ain't black
I own black, own everything black

[Bridge]
Six in the morn', fire in the street
Burn, baby, burn, that's all I wanna see
And sometimes I get off watchin' you die in vain
It's such a shame they may call me crazy
They may say I suffer from schizophrenia or somethin'
But homie, you made me
Black don't crack, my nigga

[Verse 1]
I'm the biggest hypocrite of 2015

These lines hint at the mixed feelings Lamar feels towards his blackness. On the one hand he wants to embrace it, on the other he wants to fight it. The lines in parentheses represent the United States and their denigrating view on African Americans.

Lamar portrays a riot in the ghetto.

The US can comment on blacks all they want, but in the end they made African Americans. Lamar says blacks will not give up.

Lamar thinks he is a hypocrite, because he does not want people to hate blacks, but he hates blacks as well because of structural racism...

Derogatory term for African Americans. Jay-Z and Beyoncé are famous and both black (yet, they are both of a different complexion!)

He is hopeful for the future.

Lamar names some dark colors and states that it is all beautiful.

Colors do not exist.

The outro is an ominous section: it suggests that the ghetto is a manifestation of evil on earth.
Once I finish this, witnesses will convey just what I mean. 

**Been feeling this way since I was 16,** came to my senses. 
**You never liked us anyway,** fuck your friendship, I meant it. 
**I'm African-American,** I'm African. 
**I'm black as the moon,** heritage of a small village. 
**Pardon my residence,** came from the bottom of mankind. 
**My hair is nappy,** my dick is big, my nose is round and wide. 
**You hate me don't you?** 
**You hate my people,** your plan is to terminate my culture. 
**You're fuckin' evil** I want you to recognize that. 
**I'm a proud monkey,** You vandalize my perception but can't take style from me. 
**And this is more than confession,** I mean I might press the button just so you know my discretion. 
**I'm guardin' my feelings,** I know that you feel it. 

**You sabotage my community,** makin' a killin'. 
**You made me a killer,** emancipation of a real nigga. 

[Pre-Hook] 
The blacker the berry, the sweeter the juice. 
The blacker the berry, the sweeter the juice. 
The blacker the berry, the bigger I shoot. 

[Hook] 
I said they treat me like a slave, cah' me black. 
Woi, we feel a whole heap of pain, cah' we black. 
And man a say they put me inna chains, cah' we black. 
Imagine now, big gold chains full of rocks. 
How you no see the whip, left scars pon' me back. 
But now we have a big whip parked pon' the block. 
All them say we doomed from the start, cah' we black. 
Remember this, every race start from the block, jus' member dat. 

[Verse 2] 
I'm the biggest hypocrite of 2015. 
Once I finish this, witnesses will convey just what I mean. 
I mean, it's evident that I'm irrelevant to society.

Lamar has known it since he was a teen: the US hates black people.

Lamar describes his appearance and his heritage.

The US hates and wants to get rid of the type of people Lamar described above.

Lamar thinks this is evil. 
Denigrating term for black people. 
Lamar argues the US influences his perception of black, but he will not change.

The US influences African Americans negatively, but Lamar says this only fuels the violence in ghettos. Emancipation hints at Lincoln’s *Emancipation Proclamation*.

The first three lines are encouraging words to black people. The last line returns to the hypocrisy in the ghetto: in gang-on-gang violence, blacks kill blacks.

Slavery.

Chains refer to slavery.

Slave chains versus gold rapper chain necklaces. 
Whip refers to slavery, which has left its mark on the African American race.

In this setting, whip is a luxurious car.

The black race was doomed from the start according to white people.

But every race originated in Africa according to some scientists… We are all the same.

Lamar thinks he is a hypocrite, because he does not want people to hate blacks, but he hates blacks as well because of structural racism… Blacks are useless according to the US.
That's what you're telling me, penitentiary would only hire me
Curse me till I'm dead
Church me with your fake prophesizing that I'mma be just another slave in my head
Institutionalized manipulation and lies
Reciprocity of freedom only live in your eyes
You hate me don't you?
I know you hate me just as much as you hate yourself
Jealous of my wisdom and cards I dealt
Watchin' me as I pull up, fill up my tank, then peel out
Muscle cars like pull ups, show you what these big wheels 'bout, ah
Black and successful, this black man meant to be special
Katzkins on my radar, bitch, how can I help you?
How can I tell you I'm making a killin'? You made me a killer, emancipation of a real nigga

[Pre-Hook]
The blacker the berry, the sweeter the juice
The blacker the berry, the sweeter the juice
The blacker the berry, the bigger I shoot

[Hook: Assassin]
I said they treat me like a slave, cah' me black
Woi, we feel a whole heap of pain, cah' we black
And man a say they put me inna chains, cah' we black
Imagine now, big gold chains full of rocks
How you no see the whip, left scars pon' me back
But now we have a big whip parked pon' the block
All them say we doomed from the start, cah' we black
Remember this, every race start from the block, jus 'member dat

[Verse 3]
I'm the biggest hypocrite of 2015
When I finish this if you listenin' then sure you will agree
This plot is bigger than me, it's generational hatred
It's genocism, it's grimy, little justification
I'm African-American, I'm African
I'm black as the heart of a fuckin' Aryan
I'm black as the name of Tyrone and Darius

Only jail would suit them.
The curse that rests on black people is the US constantly reiterating they are useless and that they might as well be slaves. The government is corrupt and manipulates. White people actually believe they live in a colorblind society.
The US hates black people. Lamar suggests that they are jealous of black people and that this is the reason whites suppress them.

Lamar’s career is special.
The US influences African Americans negatively, but Lamar says this only fuels the violence in ghettos. Emancipation hints at Lincoln’s Emancipation Proclamation.
The first three lines are encouraging words to black people. The last line returns to the hypocrisy in the ghetto: in gang-on-gang violence, blacks kill blacks.

Slavery.
Chains refer to slavery.
Slave chains versus gold rapper chain necklaces. Whip refers to slavery, which has left its mark on the African American race. In this setting, whip is a luxurious car.
The black race was doomed from the start according to white people. But every race originated in Africa according to some scientists… We are all the same.

Lamar thinks he is a hypocrite, because he does not want people to hate blacks, but he hates blacks as well because of structural racism… Racism has become structural because it has been passed on generation by generation. The same goes for generational gang hatred. Lamar is as black as the heart of a nazi.
Stereotypical black names.
Excuse my French but fuck you — no, fuck y'all
That's as blunt as it gets, I know you hate me,
don't you?
You hate my people, I can tell cause it's threats
when I see you
I can tell cause your ways deceitful
Know I can tell because you're in love with that
Desert Eagle
Thinkin' maliciously, he get a chain then you
gone bleed him
It's funny how Zulu and Xhosa might go to war
Two tribal armies that want to build and destroy
Remind me of these Compton Crip gangs that
live next door
Beefin' with Pirus, only death settle the score
So don't matter how much I say I like to preach
with the Panthers
Or tell Georgia State "Marcus Garvey got all the
answers"
Or try to celebrate February like it's my B-Day
Or eat watermelon, chicken, and Kool-Aid on
weekdays
Or jump high enough to get Michael Jordan
endorsements
Or watch BET cause urban support is important
So why did I weep when Trayvon Martin was in
the street when gang banging make me kill a
nigga blacker than me?
Hypocrite!

[Outro]

14. You Ain’t Gotta Lie (Momma Said)

[Produced by LoveDragon]

[Intro]
Study long, study wrong, nigga
Hey, y'all close that front door, y'all let flies in
this motherfucker
Close that door!
My OG up in this motherfucker right now
My pops man with the bottle of Hennessy in his
hand, actin' a fool
Hey, hey, babe, check it out, I'ma tell you what
my momma had said, she like:

[Verse 1]
I could spot you a mile away
I could see your insecurities written all on your
face
So predictable your words, I know what you
 gonna say

He talks about his father who is under the
influence of alcohol.
Lamar tells us what his mother says to him when
he returns to Compton:

Lamar’s mother talks about how Lamar is not
authentic anymore. He raps about the problems
in Compton, but he is never really there
anymore. He cannot know what Compton is like
because of this. Lamar’s mother says everyone
laughs about him because of this as well.
Who you foolin'? Oh, you assuming you can just come and hang
With the homies but your level of realness ain't the same
Circus acts only attract those that entertain
Small talk, we know that it's all talk
We live in the Laugh Factory every time they mention your name

[Bridge]
Askin' "where the hoes at?" to impress me
Askin' "where the moneybags?" to impress me
Say you got the burner stashed to impress me
It's all in your head, homie
Askin' "where the plug at?" to impress me
Askin' "where the juug at?" to impress me
Askin' "where it's at?" only upsets me
You sound like the feds, homie

[Hook]
You ain't gotta lie to kick it, my nigga
You ain't gotta lie, you ain't gotta lie
You ain't gotta lie to kick it, my nigga
You ain't gotta try so hard
You ain't gotta lie to kick it, my nigga
You ain't gotta lie, you ain't gotta lie
You ain't gotta lie to kick it, my nigga
You ain't gotta try so hard

[Verse 2]
And the world don't respect you
And the culture don't accept you
But you think it's all love
And the girls gon' neglect you once your parody is done
Reputation can't protect you if you never had one
Jealousy (complex), emotional (complex)
Self-pity (complex), under oath (complex)
The loudest one in the room, nigga, that's a complex
Let me put it back in proper context

[Hook]
You ain't gotta lie to kick it, my nigga
You ain't gotta lie, you ain't gotta lie
You ain't gotta lie to kick it, my nigga
You ain't gotta try so hard
You ain't gotta lie to kick it, my nigga
You ain't gotta lie, you ain't gotta lie
You ain't gotta lie to kick it, my nigga
You ain't gotta try so hard

[Bridge]
Askin' "where the hoes at?" to impress me
Askin’ “where the moneybags?” to impress me
Say you got the burner stashed to impress me
It’s all in your head, homie
Askin’ “where the plug at?” to impress me
Askin’ “where the juug at?” to impress me
Askin’ “where it’s at?” only upsets me
You sound like the feds, homie
(Pause)

[Verse 3]
What do you got to offer?
Tell me before we off ya, put you deep in the coffin
Been allergic to talkin', been a virgin to bullshit
And sell a dream in the auction, tell me just who
your boss is
Niggas be fugazi, bitches be fugazi
This is for fugazi
Niggas and bitches who make habitual lyin’ babies
Bless them little hearts
You can never persuade me
You can never relate me to him, to her, or that to them
Or you, the truth you love to bend
In the back, in the bed, on the floor, that’s your ho
On the couch, in the mouth, I’ll be out, really though
So loud, rich niggas got low money
And loud, broke niggas got no money
The irony behind it is so funny
And I seen it all this past year
Pass on some advice we feel:

[Hook]
You ain't gotta lie to kick it, my nigga
You ain't gotta lie, you ain't gotta lie
You ain't gotta lie to kick it, my nigga
You ain't gotta try so hard
You ain't gotta lie to kick it, my nigga
You ain't gotta lie, you ain't gotta lie
You ain't gotta lie to kick it, my nigga
You ain't gotta try so hard

tries to tell them all the stereotypes are untrue.
He even compares such statements to the police, who stereotype black people as well.

He asks society: what are they going to do about the situation? He is threatening with violence.

Lamar is done putting up with racism.
Hey, Hey! Hey! Turn the mic up, c’mon, c’mon
Is the mic on or not? I want the mic
We’re bringing up nobody, nobody...
Nobody but the number one rapper in the world
He done traveled all over the world
He came back just to give you some game
All of the little boys and girls, come up here
(One two, one two, what’s happening, fool?)
Come right here, this is for you, come on up
Kendrick Lamar, make some noise, brother

[Intro]
I done been through a whole lot
Trial, tribulation,
but I know God
The Devil wanna put me in a bow tie
Pray that the holy water don’t go dry
As I look around me
So many motherfuckers wanna down me
But an enemigo never drown me
In front of a dirty double-mirror they found me

[Hook]
And (I love myself)
When you lookin’ at me, tell me what do you see?
(I love myself)
Ahh, I put a bullet in the back of the back of the head of the police
(I love myself)
Illuminated-
All ya’ll come to the front
(I love myself)
One day at a time, tryna go shine

[Verse 1]
They wanna say it’s a war outside, bomb in the street
Gun in the hood, mob of police
Rock on the corner with a line for the fiend
And a bottle full of lean and a model on the scheme uh
These days of frustration keep y’all on tuck and rotation (Come to the front)
I duck these cold faces, post up fi-fie-fo-fum basis
Dreams of reality’s peace
Blow steam in the face of the beast
Sky could fall down, wind could cry now
Look at me motherfucker I smile-

[Hook]
And (I love myself)
When you lookin’ at me, tell me what do you see?
(I love myself)

Kendrick is back to teach people things.
Lamar sums up things that have happened to him: court, trial, etc. But he still found God.
The music industry wants to own him. He hopes he will never have to go back to the way it used to be.
He made a lot of enemies in the ghetto.
Double-mirrors can be found in interrogation rooms.
Kendrick Lamar wants to promote a positive message in this song: black people should love themselves.
He is done dealing with the police’s nonsense.
Lamar describes violence in the ghetto: weapons, police brutality, drugs, etc.
Lamar says: even if the bad things keep coming, he will still smile.
Kendrick Lamar wants to promote a positive message in this song: black people should love themselves.
Ahh, I put a bullet in the back of the back of the head of the police (I love myself)
Illuminated—
All ya'll come to the front, ya'll come up to the front (I love myself)
Baby what about you, come on

[Verse 2]
(Crazy, what you gon' do?)
Lift up your head and keep moving. (Keep moving) turn the mic up (Haunt you)
Peace to fashion police, I wear my heart On my sleeve, let the runway start
You know the miserable do love company
What do you want from me and my scars?
Everybody lack confidence, everybody lack confidence
How many times my potential was anonymous?
How many times the city making me promises?
So I promise this, nigga

[Hook]
(I love myself)
When you lookin' at me, tell me what do you see? (I love myself)
Ahh, I put a bullet in the back of the back of the head of the police (I love myself)
Illuminated by the hand of God, boy don't seem shy (I love myself)

[Bridge]
Huh (Walk my bare feet) Huh (Walk my bare feet)
Huh (Down, down valley deep) Huh (Down, down valley deep)
(I love myself) Huh (Fi-fie-fo-fum) Huh (Fi-fie-fo-fum)
(I love myself) Huh (My heart undone) one, two, three

[Verse 3]
I went to war last night
With an automatic weapon, don't nobody call a medic
I'ma do it till I get it right
I went to war last night (Night, night, night, night)
I've been dealing with depression ever since an adolescent

He is done dealing with the police’s nonsense.

Positivity.

People should be able to wear what they want.

These two lines suggest people should not want Lamar to rap sad things, but focus on the positive.

The city has made many empty promises, but Lamar is going to be truthful:

Kendrick Lamar wants to promote a positive message in this song: black people should love themselves.

He is done dealing with the police’s nonsense.

In his mind, Lamar rewinds scenes that happened to him in the ghetto.

The violent things that happened to him made him depressed.
Duckin’ every other blessin’, I can never see the message
I could never take the lead, I could never bob and weave
From a negative and letting them annihilate me
And it's evident I'm moving at a meteor speed
Finna run into a building, lay my body...

[Spoken Interlude]
(Offstage Argument)
Not on my, not while I'm up here
Not on my time, kill the music, not on my time
We could save that shit for the streets
We could save that shit, this for the kids bro
2015, niggas tired of playin’ victim dog
Niggas ain't trying to play vic— TuTu, how many niggas we done lost?
Yan-Yan, how many we done lost?
No for real, answer the que—, how many niggas we done lost bro?
This—, this year alone
Exactly, so we ain't got time to waste time my nigga
Niggas gotta make time bro
The judge make time, you know that, the judge make time right?
The judge make time so it ain’t shit
It shouldn’t be shit for us to come out here and appreciate the little bit of life we got left, dog
On the dead homies, Charlie P, you know that bro
You know that
It’s mando, right, it's mando
And I say this because I love you niggas man
I love all my niggas bro
Exac— enough said, enough said
And we gon’ get back to the show and move on, because that shit petty my nigga
Mic check, mic check, mic check, mic check, mic check
We gon’ do some acapella shit before we get back to-
All my niggas listen, listen to this:

[Verse 4]
I promised Dave I'd never use the phrase "fuck nigga"
He said, "Think about what you saying: "Fuck niggas"
No better than Samuel on Django
No better than a white man with slave boats"
Sound like I needed some soul searching
My Pops gave me some game in real person
Retraced my steps on what they never taught me

People want to destroy him, but that will not happen because he is thriving.
Depressed statement.

Lamar is tired of being the victim in society.
Lamar repeatedly asks his friends how many (black) friends have died already. Too many have died.

Time is running out.

Judges ‘make time’ as well: they decide how long people go to jail. The difference between the time they have (long) and the way in which the court deals with time like it is nothing is interesting.
Many have died.

It is mandatory that something changes.
This ties in with the idea that all people should love each other.

Lamar made a promise to Dave, one of his friends that died in his arms when he was younger.

Samuel Jackson played a slave on Django Unchained.
Lamar learned he needed to start with himself.
He learned from his dad.
Did my homework fast before government caught me
So I'ma dedicate this one verse to Oprah
On how the infamous, sensitive N-word control us
So many artists gave her an explanation to hold us
Well, this is my explanation straight from Ethiopia
N-E-G-U-S definition: royalty; king royalty -
wait listen
N-E-G-U-S description: black emperor, king, ruler, now let me finish
The history books overlook the word and hide it
America tried to make it to a house divided
The homies don't recognize we been using it wrong
So I'ma break it down and put my game in a song
N-E-G-U-S, say it with me, or say it no more
Black stars can come and get me
Take it from Oprah Winfrey, tell her she right on time
Kendrick Lamar, by far, realest Negus alive

Lamar was always ahead of the police.
Oprah has commented on the use of the N-word in hip hop music, which she finds deplorable.
Negus almost sounds the same as “niggas”. Here, Lamar brings black people in connection with positive things like kings, while still respecting Oprah.

Lamar reclaims his authority as a black man from the ghetto.

16. Mortal Man
[Produced by Sounwave]

[Hook 1]
The ghost of Mandela, hope my flows they propel it
Let these words be your earth and moon
You consume every message
As I lead this army make room for mistakes and depression
And with that being said my nigga, let me ask this question:

[Refrain 1]
When shit hit the fan, is you still a fan?
(One two, one two)
When shit hit the fan, is you still a fan?
When shit hit the fan, is you still a fan?

[Nelson Mandela risked his freedom for the advancement of the black race.
Lamar wants to be a prophet for black people, but he first needs to know:

Will the fans still be fans when all else goes wrong?

[Nelson Mandela risked his freedom for the advancement of the black race.
Lamar wants to be a prophet for black people, but he first needs to know:
And with that being said my nigga, let me ask this question:

[Refrain 2]
When shit hit the fan, is you still a fan?
Want you look to your left and right, make sure you ask your friends
When shit hit the fan, is you still a fan?

[Verse 1]
Do you believe in me? Are you deceiving me?
Could I let you down easily, is your heart where it need to be?
Is your smile on permanent? Is your vow on lifetime?
Would you know where the sermon is if I died in this next line?
If I’m tried in a court of law, if the industry cut me off
If the government want me dead, plant cocaine in my car
Would you judge me a drug-head or see me as K. Lamar
Or question my character and degrade me on every blog
Want you to love me like Nelson, want you to hug me like Nelson
I freed you from being a slave in your mind, you’re very welcome
You tell me my song is more than a song, it’s surely a blessing
But a prophet ain’t a prophet til they ask you this question:

[Refrain 2]
When shit hit the fan, is you still a fan?
Want you look to your left and right, make sure you ask your friends
When shit hit the fan, is you still a fan?

[Hook 2]
The ghost of Mandela, hope my flows they propel it
Let my words be your earth and moon you consume every message
As I lead this army make room for mistakes and depression
And with that-

[Verse 2]
Do you believe in me? How much you believe in her?
You think she gon’ stick around if them 25 years occur?
You think he can hold you down when you down behind bars hurt?
You think y’all on common ground if you promise to be the first? Can you be immortalized without your life being expired?
Even though you share the same blood is it worth the time?
Like who got your best interest?
Like how much are you dependent?
How clutch are the people that say they love you?
And who pretending?
How tough is your skin when they turn you in?
Do you show forgiveness?
What brush do you bend when dusting your shoulders from being offended?
What kind of den did they put you in when the lions start hissing?
What kind of bridge did they burn?
Revenge or your mind when it’s mentioned?
You wanna love like Nelson, you wanna be like Nelson
You wanna walk in his shoes but you peacemaking seldom
You wanna be remembered that delivered the message
That considered the blessing of everyone
This your lesson for everyone, say

[Refrain 2]
When shit hit the fan, is you still a fan?
When shit hit the fan, is you still a fan?
Want you look to your left and right, make sure you ask your friends
When shit hit the fan, is you still a fan?

[Hook 3]
The voice of Mandela, hope this flow stay propellin’
Let my word be your Earth and moon
You consume every message
As I lead this army make room for mistakes and depression
And if you riding with me, nigga

[Verse 3]
I been wrote off before, I got abandonment issues
I hold grudges like bad judges, don’t let me resent you
That’s not Nelson-like, want you to love me like Nelson

He asks the listener to think critically about what would happen to them if they went to jail.

Is his career worth it all? He puts a lot of time in his music at the expense of family and friends.

What would happen when you go to jail?

Would you risk your freedom for the freedom of the race as well?

Will the fans still be fans when all else goes wrong?

Nelson Mandela risked his freedom for the advancement of the black race. Lamar wants to be a prophet for black people.

This verse talks about Lamar’s internal struggles again.

But he wants to do away with these struggles: he wants to be more like Nelson Mandela.
I went to Robben’s Island analysing, that’s where his cell is. So I could find clarity, like how much you cherish me. Is this relationship a fake or real as the heavens be? See I got to question it all, family, friends, fans, cats, dogs, trees, plants, grass, how the wind blow. Murphy’s Law, generation X, will I ever be your X?

Floss off a baby step, mauled by the mouth of Pit bulls, put me under stress. Crawled under rocks, ducking y’all, it’s respect. But then tomorrow, put my back against the wall. How many leaders you said you needed then left ‘em for dead? Is it Moses, is it Huey Newton or Detroit Red? Is it Martin Luther, JFK, shoot or you assassin? Is it Jackie, is it Jesse, oh I know, it’s Michael Jackson, oh

[Refrain 3] When shit hit the fan, is you still a fan? When shit hit the fan, is you still a fan? That nigga gave us “Billie Jean”, you say he touched those kids? When shit hit the fan, is you still a fan?

[Hook 4] The ghost of Mandela, hope my flows they propel it. Let my word be your earth and moon you consume every message. As I lead this army make room for mistakes and depression. And if you riding with me nigga, let me ask this question nigga.

[Spoken Outro: Kendrick Lamar & 2Pac] “I remember you was conflicted. Misusing your influence. Sometimes I did the same. Abusing my power, full of resentment. Resentment that turned into a deep depression. Found myself screaming in the hotel room. I didn’t wanna self destruct. The evils of Lucy was all around me. So I went running for answers. Until I came home. But that didn’t stop survivor’s guilt. Going back and forth trying to convince myself the stripes I earned. Or maybe how A-1 my foundation was.

Mandela was jailed on Robben’s Island. This is where he went to gather himself. He got to think about a lot of things here.

Will Lamar ever be this generation’s Malcom X?

All of these people were leaders in some way. Sadly, they all died. This questions the use of life.

Will the fans still be fans when all else goes wrong?

Nelson Mandela risked his freedom for the advancement of the black race. Lamar wants to be a prophet for black people.

The poem finally comes to an end. The war Lamar was fighting was an internal war: he needed to rediscover himself and get a new outlook on life. He learned the following things while he was away (away from the ghetto; in South Africa; on tour; etc.):

- Black should not hate/kill/hurt black.
- Black should unite to stop the injustice inflicted against them.
- Respect.
But while my loved ones was fighting the continuous war back in the city
I was entering a new one
A war that was based on apartheid and discrimination
Made me wanna go back to the city and tell the homies what I learned
The word was respect
Just because you wore a different gang color than mine's
Doesn’t mean I can’t respect you as a black man
Forgetting all the pain and hurt we caused each other in these streets
If I respect you, we unify and stop the enemy from killing us
But I don’t know, I’m no mortal man
Maybe I’m just another nigga”
Shit and that’s all I wrote
I was gonna call it "Another Nigga" but, it ain’t really a poem
I just felt like it’s something you probably could relate to
Other than that, now that I finally got a chance to holla at you
I always wanted to ask you about a certain situ-
About a metaphor actually, uh, you spoke on the ground
What you mean by that, what the ground represent?

The ground is gonna open up and swallow the evil
Right
That’s how I see it, my word is bond
I see—and the ground is the symbol for the poor people
Right

The poor people is gonna open up this whole world
And swallow up the rich people
‘Cause the rich people gonna be so fat
And they gonna be so appetizing, you know what
I’m saying Wealthy, appetizing
The poor gonna be so poor, and hungry
Right
You know what I’m saying, it’s gonna be like
You know what I’m saying, it’s gonna be...
There might, there might be some cannibalism
out this muh-fu-
They might eat the rich, you know what I’m saying?

Aight so let me ask you this then
Do you see yourself as somebody that’s rich

The people at the bottom of society are going to stop the evil: the government, the rich, etc.
Or somebody that made the best of they own opportunities?

I see myself as a natural born hustler
A true hustler in every sense of the word
I took nothin’, I took the opportunities
I worked at the most menial and degrading job
And built myself up so I could get it to where I owned it
I went from having somebody managing me
To me hiring the person that works my management company
I changed everything, I realized my destiny
In a matter of five years, you know what I’m saying?
I made myself a millionaire, I made millions for a lot of people
Now it’s time to make millions for myself, you know what I’m saying?
I made millions for the record companies
I made millions for these movie companies
Now I make millions for, for us
And through your different avenues of success
How would you say you managed to keep a level of sanity?

By my faith in God, by my faith in the game
And by my faith in "all good things come to those that stay true"
Right
You know what I’m saying?
And it was happening to me for a reason
You know what I’m saying, I was noticing, shit
I was punching the right buttons and it was happening
So it’s no problem, you know
I mean, it’s a problem but I’m not finna let them know
I’m finna go straight through

Would you consider yourself a fighter at heart or somebody that
Somebody that only reacts when they back is against the wall?

Shit, I like to think that at every opportunity I’ve ever been, uh Threatened with resistance, it’s been met with resistance
And not only me but, it goes down my family tree
You know what I’m saying, it’s in my veins to fight back

Aight well, how long will you think it take before niggas be like

This section and the section below support Lamar’s argument: he has deserved to be where he is, but he will always remain loyal to ‘his people’.
Tupac started from the bottom and made it all the way to where he is now.
Argument against the rap industry.

Argument against the rap industry.

God, knowledge, and faith kept him on the right track.

Black will fight back. It has been passed on generation by generation.
"We fighting a war, I’m fighting a war I can’t win
And I wanna lay it all down"

*In this country, a black man only have like 5 years we can exhibit maximum strength And that’s right now while you a teenager, while you still strong*

**While you still wanna lift weights, while you still wanna shoot back 'Cause once you turn 30 it’s like They take the heart and soul out of a man Out of a black man, in this country And you don’t wanna fight no more And if you don’t believe me, you can look around You don’t see no loud mouth 30-year old motherfuckers**

That’s crazy, because me being one of your offsprings Of the legacy you left behind, I can truly tell you that There’s nothing but turmoil goin’ on so, I wanted ask you What you think is the future for me and my generation today?

*I think that niggas is tired of grabbin' shit out the stores And next time it's a riot it's gonna be like, uh, bloodshed*

*For real, I don’t think America know that I think America think we was just playing And it’s gonna be some more playing but It ain’t gonna be no playing It’s gonna be murder, you know what I’m saying? It’s gonna be like Nat Turner, 1831, up in this motherfucker You know what I’m saying, it’s gonna happen*

That’s crazy man, in my opinion Only hope that we kinda have left is music and vibrations Lot a people don’t understand how important it is, you know Sometimes I can like, get behind a mic And I don’t know what type of energy I’m push out Or where it comes from, trip me out sometimes

*Because it's spirits, we ain't even really rappin' We just letting our dead homies tell stories for us*

There comes a point in life at which you do not want to fight anymore and at which you do not have the power to do so anymore. That is why hip hop should be directed at young people.

This is a warning: black people are done with their perpetual mistreatment. They will one day say “stop” and there is no guarantee that it is going to go nicely when this time comes.

Nat Turner led a slave rebellion in 1831.

Rap is basically telling life stories.
Damn

I wanted to read one last thing to you
It’s actually something a good friend had wrote
Describing my world, it says:

“The caterpillar is a prisoner to the streets that conceived it
Its only job is to eat or consume everything around it
In order to protect itself from this mad city
While consuming its environment
The caterpillar begins to notice ways to survive
One thing it noticed is how much the world shuns him
But praises the butterfly
The butterfly represents the talent, the thoughtfulness
And the beauty within the caterpillar
But having a harsh outlook on life
The caterpillar sees the butterfly as weak
And figures out a way to pimp it to his own benefits
Already surrounded by this mad city
The caterpillar goes to work on the cocoon
Which institutionalizes him
He can no longer see past his own thoughts
He’s trapped
When trapped inside these walls certain ideas take root, such as
Going home, and bringing back new concepts to this mad city
The result?
Wings begin to emerge, breaking the cycle of feeling stagnant
Finally free, the butterfly sheds light on situations
That the caterpillar never considered, ending the internal struggle
Although the butterfly and caterpillar are completely different
They are one and the same*”

What’s your perspective on that? Pac? Pac? Pac?!

The allegory that is intertwined with this album is explained. The cocoon is the ghetto, the caterpillar its inhabitants, and the butterfly one of the few (such as Lamar) who manage to make it out of the ghetto. The poem talks about how the caterpillars fight for their lives in the ghetto and in jail, and how they are sometimes jealous of the butterflies. Lamar says the caterpillars can truly become ‘free’ when they learn a new outlook on life from the butterflies. In the end, they are the same.

Appendix 4 is a visual analysis of Kendrick Lamar’s 2015 music video for the song Alright. The focus of the analysis is on the sociopolitical content of the video. The lyrics of Alright can be found in appendix 3.7. The images provided below are screenshots of the music video and originate from Lamar’s VEVO channel on YouTube.


ANALYSIS

What becomes clear from the beginning of Kendrick Lamar’s music video for Alright is that this video is going to convey a message. The video is shot with a black and white filter and the usage of this filter is significant, because it immediately pits black against white. This helps Lamar set the scene: his argument will be based on race. The black and white filter also makes the viewer feel scared and sad, something Lamar wants you to feel in order to make his argument even more powerful (All images).

The viewer is shown a variety of images from the city, reaching from the business district to the ghetto. The contrast is notable: the buildings in the city are large, regal-looking, and shiny, whereas the houses in the ghetto are fenced, daub with graffiti, and close to falling apart. The people in the city have everything, while the ghetto is a depressing place. Note the fact that the producer chose to put graffiti on the fences in the ghetto: this was one of hip hop’s main art forms in its early years (Images 1-4).

People of many ethnicities are displayed as well. This hints at the cultural diversity of the ghetto, but also informs the viewer who the song is about: minorities. These minorities are not treated well, however. One black man is portrayed on the ground and a black girl’s face is covered in blood, for instance (Images 5-7).

Next, a gang riot bursts out. Black men are drinking liquor and starting fires. They are also demolishing a police car (Images 8-9). The riot is a result of the black man’s anger towards racism. The demolition of the police car is of high significance: it is a clear statement that black people will no longer accept police brutality and institutional racism.
In the scene that follows, a black man is (seemingly) held against the floor and arrested. The camera tilts, however, and it is revealed that the man was manhandled against the wall by a white police officer. The black man manages to escape the officer’s handcuffs and runs away. The officer pulls out his gun and shoots at the black man. The bullet is shown in slow motion, which makes it a tense scene and makes the viewer want to know how this ends. The viewer is left guessing what happens, because the screen fades to black (Images 10-12). There is nothing interpretative about this scene: this is really the way in which black people are treated by (white) police officers. They do not get a second chance: they are shot immediately. Lamar wants this to be known.

In Image 13, the viewer sees the city in the distance. The city is big and has tall buildings. It represents hope and wealth. The fact that the viewer is located miles and miles away might suggest the viewer is in the ghetto. The distance makes the viewer feel sad and long for a better future (Image 13).

The next two scenes mock the police. In the first scene, Lamar and his friends are dancing and rapping in a car. Seconds later, it is revealed that the car is being carried by white policemen. The second scene shows three black children dancing on top of a police wagon (Images 14-15). These scenes send out powerful messages. While black people are being oppressed in real life, this video shows the viewer the opposite: the oppressor (police) is being oppressed.

Finally, there is a scene that shows Lamar dancing on top of a street light. A white police officer pulls up in his police car. He gets out of the car with a huge rifle. Instead of using this rifle, the officer makes a gun using his fingers. With this finger gun, the officer shoots Lamar and the rapper falls to the ground. The viewer thinks Lamar is dead, but the last image shown in the video is a shot of Lamar opening his eyes and smiling at the camera. He is alive (Images 16-19). This scene makes several strong statements. First, black people can literally do nothing wrong (dancing) and still be arrested/hurt/killed by the police. Second, the fact the police chooses not to use his gun might hint at the fact that officers have killed black people with their bare hands (e.g. Eric Garner) as well. Police violence thus goes very far. Lastly, the fact that Lamar is not killed, but smiles in the end suggests that Lamar (and other black people) will remain positive and hopeful for a better future.
IMAGES

Image 1 – city building

Image 2 – graffiti in the ghetto

Image 3 – ghetto houses

Image 4 – the city
Image 5 – minorities in the ghetto

Image 6 – black man on the ground

Image 7 – black girl with blood on her face

Image 8 – fire; gang riots
Image 9 – gang riots; black man demolishing a police car

Image 10 – black man (seemingly) thrown on the ground

Image 11 – the view has shifted; the black man was manhandled to the wall by a white police officer

Image 12 – the white officer shoots at the black man
Image 13 – the city in the distance

Image 14 – Lamar and his friends are being carried by white policemen

Image 15 – black children dancing on top of a police car

Image 16 – white police officer with large rifle
Image 17 – white policeman pointing a finger gun at Lamar

Image 18 – Lamar is shot and falls down

Image 19 – ending scene; Lamar is still laughing
APPENDIX 5: KENDRICK LAMAR – GRAMMY AWARDS PERFORMANCE (2016)

Appendix 5 is an analysis of Kendrick Lamar’s performance of the songs *The Blacker the Berry* and *Alright* at the 2016 Grammy Awards. The focus of the analysis is on the sociopolitical content of the performance. The lyrics of *The Blacker the Berry* and *Alright* can be found in Appendixes 3.13 and 3.7 respectively. The images provided below are screenshots of the performance and originate from a website called The Verge.


---

ANALYSIS

During the 2016 Grammy Awards, Kendrick Lamar performed *The Blacker the Berry* and *Alright*. The message of his performance already starts with the significance of choosing to perform these two songs: whereas *The Blacker the Berry* is a quite negative song, *Alright* is all about racial uplift. Performing these songs consecutively creates a ‘feel-good’ story and sends out a positive message.

Lamar begins his performance by walking out on stage in line with other black men wearing chains, while other black men are jailed (*Images 1-2*). The chains and cells represent multiple things. It refers to slavery, mass incarceration of black men, and oppression of the black race in general.

He starts rapping *The Blacker the Berry* and by the end of the song, the men break free from their chains and a black light turns on. The black light reveals white stripes on some of the men’s suits, while it reveals African indigenous skin paint on others (*Images 3-4*). The rapper then transitions to rapping *Alright*. This part of the performance is very interesting. First, breaking free from the chains suggest African Americans will no longer put up with everything that American institutions are doing to them. The transition to the song *Alright* shortly after this implies a bright future for African Americans. Personally, I think the white stripes on the men’s suits are reminiscent of skeletons. This might hint at the fact that everyone is the same on the inside, even when our skin colors are different. The indigenous skin paint is a first glimpse of what is to come.

*Alright* is performed in a completely African setting. The dancers are wearing African tribal outfits, playing African drums, doing African dances, etc. (*Image 5*). All of these features of the
performance are a reference to Lamar’s roots: Africa. This is where African Americans originate from and their culture should be cherished and celebrated.

The ending of Lamar’s performance is powerful. The stage and lighting fade to black, except for the background, which displays a white picture of the continent of Africa with the word “Compton” written in it in black (Image 6). The background displays exactly what Kendrick Lamar’s roots are: he is African and he is American. There is thus a little bit of Africa in America, and a little bit of America in Africa. On a deeper level, the fact that Africa is white and Compton black once again pits black against white. It is extra interesting that Africa is white, because this is where black people come from. Instead, black is in America.
Image 3 – the men break free from their chains

Image 4 – the black lights reveal clothes reminiscent of skeletons and/or Africa

Image 5 – black women in African attire
Image 6 – the end of the performance; an image of Africa in which “Compton” is written
The following listening charts are close readings of the songs on J. Cole’s album *4 Your Eyez Only* (2015). The focus of the lyrical analyses is on the sociopolitical content of the lyrics. Lyrics highlighted in yellow on the left side are further explained on the right side. All lyrics have been acquired through *Genius*, an online database for lyrics and musical knowledge.


1. **For Whom the Bell Tolls**

   **[Intro]**
   
   I see the, I see the—
   I see the, I see the—
   I see the rain
   Pouring down
   Before my very eyes
   Should come as no surprise
   I see the, I see the rain
   Pouring down, uh
   Before my very eyes
   Should come as no surprise

   **[Verse]**
   
   I'm searching and praying and hoping for something
   I know I'm gon' see it, I know that it's coming
   Lord, huh
   Lord, huh
   But what do you do when there's no place to turn?
   I have no one, I'm lonely, my bridges have burnt down
   Lord
   Lord

   **[Chorus]**
   
   The bells getting loud, ain't nowhere to hide
   Got nowhere to go, put away my pride
   Tired of feeling low even when I'm high
   Ain't no way to live, do I wanna die?
   I don't know, I don't know
   Bells getting loud, ain't nowhere to hide
   Got nowhere to go, put away my pride
   Tired of feeling low even when I'm high
   Ain't no way to live, do I wanna die?
   I don't know, I don't know

   **[Outro]**
   
   Bells gettin' louder, louder
   I see the rain
   Pouring down

   Depressed image.

   He wants to look towards the future, but he cannot.
   He does, however, know a better future is out there somewhere.
   He does not have anywhere to go.
   He is lonely and his relationships have failed, perhaps because of his career.
   Bells ring when someone dies. He thinks his end is near. He is really depressed, even under the influence of drugs.
   He is contemplating suicide.
2. Immortal

[Intro]
Awwwww...haha

[Verse 1]
Now I was barely seventeen with a pocket full of hope
Screamin' "dollar and a dream" with my closet lookin' broke
And my nigga's lookin' clean, gettin' caught up with that dope
Have you ever served a fiend with a pocket full of soap?
Nigga I can tell you things that you probably shouldn't know
Have you ever heard the screams when the body hit the floor?
Flashbacks to the pain, wakin' up, cold sweats
Six o'clock in the mornin', gotta hit the BowFlex
Get my weight up on the block, keep watch for the cops
God they love to serve a nigga three hots and a cot
Nowadays crime pays like a part time job
And the drought got me prayin' for a Carl Thom vibe
Summer Rain come again
Numb the pain 'cause it's hard for a felon
In my mind I been cryin', know it's wrong but I'm sellin'
Eyes wellin' up with tears
Thinkin' 'bout my niggas dead in the dirt
Immortalized on this shirt

[Hook]
Real niggas don't die
Forward with the plot
One-Seven-Forty-Five
Form at the plot
Real niggas don't die
Form on the block
Real niggas don't lie
Form in the plot
My niggas don't die
Form on the block
Real niggas don't die
Real niggas don't die
Real niggas don't die

[Verse 2]
Have you ever seen a fiend cook crack on the spoon?
When J. Cole was younger, he was broke. He could not resist the urge of dealing drugs in order to make money.
Soap refers to fake cocaine.
J. Cole speaks from life experience. He has experienced murder and experiences PTSD from it.
Watch out for the police, because they like arresting black people.
Three hots and a cot refers to the meals a felon receives in prison.
Selling drugs does not make you rich.
Use drugs.
He knows selling drugs is wrong, but he needs it in order to stay alive.
Many of his black friends have died.
Black people may die physically, but they will never be forgotten.
J. Cole asks the listener a couple of questions concerning drugs, incarceration, and black opportunities.
Have you ever seen a nigga that was black on
the moon?
Have you ever seen your brother go to prison as
you cry?
Have you ever seen a motherfuckin' ribbon in
the sky?
Nope, all I see is that C.R.E.A.M nigga, that
green
I'm a black king, black jeans on my black queen
And her ass fat, too fat for a flat screen
I'm the type of nigga make the whole fuckin'
trap lean
Kingpin nigga, put wings on a crack fiend
If they want a nigga, they gon' have to send a
SWAT team
And I'm goin' out like Scarface in his last scene
A legend, what that mean—?

[Hook]
Real niggas don't die
Forward with the plot
One-Seven-Forty-Five
Form at the plot
Real niggas don't die
Form on the block
Hood niggas don't lie
Form in the plot
My niggas don't die
Form on the block
Real niggas don't die
Form on the block
Real niggas don't die
Real niggas don't die

[Outro]
To die a young legend or live a long life
unfulfilled
'Cause you wanna change the world
But while alive you never will
'Cause they only feel you after you gone, or I've
been told
And now I'm caught between bein' heard and
gettin' old
Damn, death creepin' in my thoughts lately
My one wish in this bitch, "Make it quick if the
Lord take me"
I know nobody meant to live forever anyway
And so I hustle like my niggas in Virgini-A
They tellin' niggas, "sell dope, rap or go to
NBA," (in that order)
It's that sort of thinkin' that been keepin' niggas
chained
At the bottom and hanged
The strangest fruit that you ever seen
Ripe with pain, listen...

C.R.E.A.M. is an acronym for “cash rules
everything around me”. Money seems to be the
most important thing.

Cocaine addict.
He will not let himself be caught that easily.

What does it mean to be a legend? He asks
himself this question with regards to the hook, in
which he claims that ‘real niggas don’t die’.

Does he want to take action and die young or die
of old age but unsatisfied?

Most people probably choose the latter.
People are only remembered when they are
gone.
He is still contemplating the question he asked
in the first line of the outro.
J. Cole is depressed. He thinks about suicide.
If he were to die, he wants it to be quick and
painless.
We are all meant to die.

Other rappers encourage black people to start
selling drugs, and if that does not work to aim
for better careers. J. Cole comments that this is
the wrong mindset: it should be the other way
around. Such crime keeps African Americans at
the bottom of society.
3. **Deja vu**

[Intro]
Ayy, put a finger in the sky if you want it, nigga
Ayy, put two fingers in the sky if you want her
Ayy, put a finger in the sky if you want it, nigga
Ayy, put two fingers in the sky if you want her
Ayy, put a finger in the sky if you want it, nigga
Ayy, put two fingers in the sky if you want her

[Verse 1]
Sometimes you worry bout the things he can provide for ya
Whenever you around I seem to come alive for ya
I finally recognize the feelings that's inside for ya
Although I know your man and trust me he would die for ya
These quiet thoughts of you been going on for years now
I saw you in the party, soft lips, soft spoken
I came and talked to you but homie interfered now
He introduced you as his girl and I was heartbroken
Some people talk about that love at first sight shit
To keep it real I don't know whether I believe it's true
But if it is then tell me if I'm wrong or right
If I fell in love with you before I ever even knew I catch your eye then look away as if it never happened
At times I feel as though I'm caught up in a strange dream
If eyes could talk then mines would tell ya that I'm feeling you
Sometimes I swear your eyes be telling me the same thing

[Pre-Hook]
She fuck with small town niggas, I got bigger dreams
She fuck with small town niggas, I got bigger dreams (listen)
She fuck with small town niggas, I got bigger dreams
She fuck with small town niggas, I got bigger dreams (listen)
[Hook]
Club jumping, don't stop, off top
But you know we only go 'till 2 o'clock
Put yo motherfuckin' hood up, it's the weekend
Drop that, back that ass up and bitches get to freaking
Last call at the bar, ladies get a drink, nigga get some balls
Ain't no telling you gonna see that bitch tomorrow
Stop holding up the wall waiting for the right song
Better holla cause you know they bout to cut the lights on

[Verse 2]
And put my number in it—
I'm staring at you from afar, I'm wondering about you
Like, where you from and who you are?
'Cause you a star—no, not the type that snort the white lines
I mean the type to light the night time, I heard you got a man
But who in their right mind letting you out the house alone?
Tell me is your house a home?
Why you in the club looking like you out your zone?
Now be discreet and pull out your phone and put my number in it
Text a nigga when your man leave you unattended
On a scale from 1 to 10 that girl's a hundred and I want it
No question, I know destiny well
And though I sin the Lord blessing me still
Every saint got a past, every sinner got a future
Every loser gotta win and every winner gotta lose someday
They say it's just a matter of time
And if I had my way then you would be mine

[Pre-Hook]
She fuck with small town niggas, I got bigger dreams
She fuck with small town niggas, I got bigger dreams (listen)
She fuck with small town niggas, I got bigger dreams
She fuck with small town niggas, I got bigger dreams

[Hook]
Club jumping, don't stop, off top
Sniffing cocaine.
But you know we only go 'till 2 o'clock
Put yo motherfuckin' hood up, it's the weekend
Drop that, back that ass up and bitches get to freaking
Last call at the bar, ladies get a drink, nigga get some balls
Ain't no telling you gonna see that bitch tomorrow
Stop holding up the wall waiting for the right song
Better holla 'cause you know they bout to cut the lights on

[Bridge]
I know you were made for me but
Darling don't you wait for me
'Cause I can see the promised land
But I can't do no promising
I know you were made for me but
Darling don't you wait for me
'Cause I can see the promised land
But I can't do no promising

[Outro]
Ayy, put a finger in the sky if you want it, nigga
Ayy, put two fingers in the sky if you want her
Ayy, put a finger in the sky if you want it, nigga
Ayy, put two fingers in the sky if you want her
Ayy, put a finger in the sky if you want it, nigga
Ayy, put two fingers in the sky if you want her
Ayy, put a finger in the sky if you want it, nigga
Ayy, put two fingers in the sky if you want her

4. Ville Mentality

[Hook]
How long can I survive with this mentality?
How long can I survive with this mentality?
Things fall down, but don't stop now
Oh, can't stop now
Oh, won't stop now

[Verse]
Trials and tribulations I'm facing
In this age of information, I hate this shit
Cause niggas hit my phone when they want some shit
Bitches hit my phone when they want some dick
Damn it, won't be long 'fore I disappear
Damn it, won't be long 'fore I disappear
Damn it, won't be long 'fore I disappear
Damn it, won't be long 'fore I disappear
You call it runnin', I call it escapin'
Start a new life in a foreign location

He still has to deal with court cases.
An age in which anything can be found online.
Because he is a drug dealer.

He is thinking about leaving and looking for a better life elsewhere.
Similar to my niggas duckin' cases
Can't take the possible time that he faces

[Hook]
How long can I survive with this mentality?
How long can I survive with this mentality?
Things fall down, but don't stop now
  Oh, can't stop now
  Oh, won't stop now

[Interlude]
My dad, he died—he got shot 'cause his friend set him up. And I didn't go to his funeral—and sometimes when I'm in my room, I get mad at my momma when she mean to me. And she—
  And she say, "clean up"—I say—

[Bridge]
Nigga play me, never, give up my chain, never
  Give up my pride, never, show 'em my pain, never
Dirt on my name, never, dirt on my name, never
Dirt on my name, never, dirt on my name, never
Nigga play me, never, give up my chain, never
  Give up my pride, never, show 'em my pain, never
Dirt on my name, never, dirt on my name, never
Dirt on my name, never, dirt on my name, never

[Hook]
How long can I survive with this mentality?
How long can I survive with this mentality?
Things fall down, but don't stop now
  Oh, can't stop now
  Oh, won't stop now

[Outro]
I get mad and I slam my door and go in my room—
And then, I get mad and I say, "I wish my dad was here"

Time in jail.

His father was killed and taken advantage of.

Black pride.

5. She’s Mine, Pt. 1

[Intro]
I never felt so alive
I never felt so alive
I never felt so alive (I never felt so alive)
I never felt so alive (I never felt so alive)

[Interlude]
Catch me, don't you—
  Catch me, don't you catch me
I've fallen in love for the first time

He does not want to get caught (by the police) because he has fallen in love and he does not want to…
I wanna cry  
And I ain't even tryna fight it  
Don't wanna die (Don't wanna die no more)  
Cause now you're here and I just wanna be  
Right by your side  
On any night that you be crying, baby  
I'll dry your eyes  
I'll dry your eyes

[Verse]
Every time you go to sleep you look like you in Heaven  
Plus the head game is stronger than a few Excedrin  
You shine just like the patent leather on my new 11's  
You read me like a book like I'm the Bible, you the Reverend  
Yeah, I wanna tell the truth to you  
I wanna talk about my days as a youth to you  
Exposing you to all my demons and the reasons I'm this way  
I would like to paint a picture, but it'll take more than a day  
It would take more than some years to get all over all my fears  
Preventing me from letting you see all of me perfectly clear  
The same wall that's stopping me from letting go and shedding tears  
From the lack of having father, and the passing of my peers  
While I'm too scared to expose myself  
It turns out, you know me better than I know myself  
Better than I know myself  
Well how 'bout that?

[Outro]
She gets him (you get me)  
She hugs him (you kiss me)  
You tell me you miss me  
And I believe you, I believe you  
She gets him (you get me)  
She hugs him (you kiss me)  
You tell me you miss me  
And I believe you, I believe you  
Catch me, don't you—  
Catch me, don't you catch me  
I've fallen in love for the first time

6. Change
[Intro]
My intuition is telling me there'll be better days,
yeah
My intuition is telling me there'll be better days
I like this tone

[Verse 1]
Yeah, my intuition is telling me there'll be better days
I sit in silence and find whenever I meditate
My fears alleviate, my tears evaporate
My faith don't deviate, ideas don't have a date
But see I'm growing and getting stronger with every breath
Bringing me closer to Heaven's doors with every step
As we speak I'm at peace, no longer scared to die
Most niggas don't believe in God and so they terrified
It's either that or they be fearing they gon' go to Hell
Asking the Father for forgiveness, got 'em overwhelmed (Please, God, I want to go to Heaven)
As if He's spiteful like them white folks that control the jail
See I believe if God is real, He'd never judge a man
Because He knows us all and therefore He would understand
The ignorance that make a nigga take his brother's life
The bitterness and pain that got him beating on his wife

[Hook]
I know you desperate for a change let the pen glide
But the only real change come from inside
(Come from inside)
But the only real change come from inside
(Come from inside)
But the only real change come from—
In cemeteries or in chains I see men cry
But the only real change come from inside
(Come from inside)
But the only real change come from inside
(Come from inside)
But the only real change come from—

[Verse 2]
Yeah, my chosen religion
Jesus piece frozen from sinnin'
Doin' dirt, hoping to God, He know my intentions

J. Cole is hopeful for the future.

J. Cole has found his hope in God and compares himself to other black people.

Statement against white supremacy and mass incarceration of black people.
J. Cole thinks God would understand crime in case of a black man: African Americans have been through so much misery.

Hip hop is one of the agents of change, but J. Cole wants to encourage people to change themselves as well.

Reference to slavery/jail.
To see a million 'fore I see a casket
I got a baby on the way, know he gon' be a bastard
I'm living fast like I'm in a drag race, how that cash taste
When I was a senior, I was ballin' on my classmates
Niggas put three bullets in my car, one hit the gas tank
Know I got a angel cause I'm supposed to have a halo
Right now, my lifestyle destined for a federal facility
For my ability to make them birds fly
Fiends wanna get higher than a bird's eye view
And who am I to tell a nigga what to do?
I just supply, it's economics
My business ain't got the suit and tie
Keep a pistol at all times, niggas want what's mine
I can't oblige, dog, I work too hard
So reach for it, get referred to God, I'm going hard, nigga

[Hook]
I know you desperate for a change let the pen glide
But the only real change come from inside
But the only real change come from inside
But the only real change come from—
In cemeteries or in chains I see men cry
But the only real change come from inside
But the only real change come from inside
But the only real change come from—

[Verse 3]
Yeah, prodigal son, got a new gun
This one don't run out of ammo
Lately been working on my handles
Can I ball, become a star and remain my self?
If I fall, dust it off and regain my self
Fuck 'em all, they don't know all the pain I felt
I'm in awe, after all the fame I felt, I evolved
I no longer bury demons, I be a vessel for the truth until I'm barely breathing, I'm singing

[Bridge: Ari Lennox & J. Cole]
Life is all about the evolution
I give up, I give in, I move back a little
I live up, I look up, now I'm back for more
You can dream but don't neglect the execution
I give up, I give in, I move back a little
I live up, I look up, now I'm back for more
Time is short that's what somebody told me
I give up, I give in, I move back a little

J. Cole talks about how he should have already died by now.
Cole should be in jail for selling drugs (making people high).
Drug dealing is a matter of supply and demand.
Dealing drugs is risky, though: drugs are in high demand.
Hip hop is one of the agents of change, but J. Cole wants to encourage people to change themselves as well.
Reference to slavery/jail.
Cole found a metaphorical weapon to incite change: writing hip hop music.
Pain from his youth.

J. Cole wants to encourage people to change.
Life is short, especially when you live in the ghetto.
I live up, I look up, now I'm back for more
Too short to keep following your homies
I give up, I give in, I move back a little
I live up, I look up, now I'm back for more

[Bridge]
I reminisce back to a time where niggas threw
they hands
All of a sudden niggas pop a trunk and then we
scram
Finger on trigger make a little nigga understand
What it's like to finally be the motherfuckin' man
Eyes wide that's from the power that the coward feels
Niggas die over bitches, disrespect, and dollar bills
Bloodshed that turned the city to a battlefield
I call it poison, you call it real (pop, pop, pop, pop)
That's how you feel?

[Verse 4]
Pistols be poppin' and niggas drop in a heartbeat
Scattered like roaches, a body laid on the concrete
A body laid on the concrete
Look, somebody laid on the concrete
No time for that, ain't no lookin' back, cause I'm running too
I made it home, I woke up and turned on the morning news
Overcame with a feeling I can't explain
Cause that was my nigga James that was slain,
he was 22
(Last night at around...) He was 22
(22 year old black male, suspect, reporting live...)

[Outro]
(I swear to God, bruh)
We're gathered here today...
(I swear to God)
To mourn the life of James McMillan Jr
(I swear to God—nigga, I'mma kill them niggas, man)
A tragedy, another tragedy in the black community
(I promise you, bro...)
We got to do better, people 22 years old, this boy was too young
(I promise you, bro, I'mma kill them niggas, yo...)
Our condolences go to his family, our prayers
(I'mma kill them niggas myself...)

J. Cole thinks back of a time in which people fought in the streets of the ghetto and where cars were loaded with guns.

The ghetto is compared to a battlefield.

In the ghetto, people are killed often. They are compared like roaches (dirty and/or many of them) in the streets.

His friend was killed.

The death of his friend is being treated like news.

The outro is contradictory. On the one hand, J. Cole is encouraging people that something needs to change. On the other hand, J. Cole is promising his late friend that he will take revenge (in parentheses).
We know he's in a better place

[Verse 1]

Yeah, I don't want no picture with the president
I just wanna talk to the man
Speak for the boys in the bando
And my nigga never walkin' again

I know these things happen often
But I'm back on the scene
I was lost in a dream as I write this
The team down in Austin

I been buildin' me a house
Back home in the South, ma
Won't believe what it's costin'
And it's fit for a king, right?
Or a nigga that could sing

And explain all the pain that it cost him
My sixteen should've came with a coffin
Fuck the fame and the fortune
Well, maybe not the fortune
But one thing is for sure though
The fame is exhaustin'

That's why I moved away, I needed privacy
Surrounded by the trees and Ivy League Students
That's recruited highly
Thinkin' "You do you and I do me"

Crib has got a big 'ol back 'ol yard
My niggas stand outside and pass cigars
Filled with marijuana, laughin' hard

Thankful that they friend's a platinum star
In the driveway there's no rapper cars
Just some shit to get from back and forth
Just some shit to get from back and forth

Welcome to the Sheltuh, this is pure
We'll help you if you've felt too insecure
To be the star you always knew you were
Wait, I think police is at the door

7. Neighbors

[Intro]
I guess the neighbors think I'm sellin' dope,
sellin' dope
Okay, the neighbors think I'm sellin' dope, sellin' dope
Sellin' dope, sellin' dope, sellin' dope

[Verse 1]
J. Cole once rented a house in a white neighborhood to record his songs. The (white) neighbors called the police because they thought Cole was selling drugs.

J. Cole only wants to tell the president how much people in the ghetto are suffering.

J. Cole moved away from the ghetto for a while. He was able to afford a big house with the money that he earned rapping about the pain he went through.

The ghetto could have killed him when he was younger.

Drugs.
His friends from the ghetto are happy to have a 'rich' friend. They do not have luxurious cars and that is why the neighbors think they are selling/doing drugs.

The neighbors called the police.
Okay, the neighbors think I’m sellin’ dope
Hm, I guess the neighbors think I’m sellin’ dope

The neighbors think I’m—neighbors think I’m—
(Don’t follow me, don’t follow me...)
I think the neighbors think I’m sellin’ dope
(Don’t follow me, don’t follow me...)
I guess the neighbors think I’m sellin’ dope,
sellin’ dope
Sellin’ dope, sellin’ dope, sellin’ dope
Well motherfucker, I am

Some things you can’t escape:
Death, taxes, and a racist society that make
Every nigga feel like a candidate
For a Trayvon kinda fate
Even when your crib sit on a lake
Even when your plaques hang on a wall
Even when the president jam your tape
Took a little break just to annotate
How I feel, damn, it’s late
I can’t sleep cause I’m paranoid
Black in a white man territory
Cops bust in with the army guns
No evidence of the harm we done
Just a couple neighbors that assume we slang
Only time they see us we be on the news, in chains, damn

Don’t follow me
Don’t follow me
Don’t follow me
Don’t follow me

Okay, the neighbors think I’m sellin’ dope
Hm, I guess the neighbors think I’m sellin’ dope

The neighbors think I’m—neighbors think I’m—
(Don’t follow me, don’t follow me...)
I think the neighbors think I’m sellin’ dope
(Don’t follow me, don’t follow me...)
I guess the neighbors think I’m sellin’ dope,
sellin’ dope
Sellin’ dope, sellin’ dope, sellin’ dope
Well motherfucker, I am

I am, I am, I am, I am
Well, motherfucker. I am
I think the neighbors think I’m sellin’ dope

J. Cole once rented a house in a white neighborhood to record his songs. The (white) neighbors called the police because they thought Cole was selling drugs. This was not the case, but Cole provocatively says he was.

J. Cole lists things you cannot escape in society. The first two are obvious, the racist society is however what he wants to comment on. He refers to Trayvon Martin, who was an African American killed by white policemen.

J. Cole feels unsafe in the white neighborhood, because he feels like the white people are out to get him, even when there is no evidence of him doing anything wrong.

White people are prejudiced, because they often see black people being arrested on TV.
I am, I am, I am
Well, motherfucker, I am
So much for integration
Don't know what I was thinkin'
I'm movin' back to south side
So much for integration
Don't know what I was thinkin'
I'm movin' back to south side

J. Cole regrets that he moved to a white neighborhood. He cannot integrate there. He is going back to the ghetto.

8. Foldin Clothes

[Hook]
I wanna fold clothes for you
I wanna make you feel good
Baby, I wanna do the right things they
Feel so much better than the wrong things
I said I wanna fold clothes for you
I wanna make you feel good
Baby, I wanna do the right things they
Feel so much better than the wrong things
I wanna fold clothes for you

[Verse 1]
I wanna fold clothes for you
Woke up this morning
Feeling like the best version of me, so happy
I walked in the living room
And saw you all alone on the couch, just napping
I, I see a lot on your plate
Nine months with that weight
I know you tired so I wonder how I can help
I get the basket and grab your clothes out the dryer
Oh, I wanna fold clothes for you

[Hook]
I wanna fold clothes for you
I wanna make you feel good
Baby, I wanna do the right things they
Feel so much better than the wrong things
I said I wanna fold clothes for you
I wanna make you feel good
Baby, I wanna do the right things they
Feel so much better than the wrong things
I wanna fold clothes for you

[Verse 2]
Listen, this is a meditation for me
A practice in being present
There's nowhere I need to be
Except right here with you
Except right here with you
Folding clothes
Watching Netflix
Catching up on our shows
Eating breakfast
Raisin Bran in my bowl
With bananas and some almond milk
I never thought I’d see the day
I’m drinking almond milk
("You soft!")

[Hook]
I wanna fold clothes for you
I wanna make you feel good
Baby, I wanna do the right things they
Feel so much better than the wrong things
I said I wanna fold clothes for you
I wanna make you feel good
Baby, I wanna do the right things they
Feel so much better than the wrong things
I wanna fold clothes for you

[Bridge]
If I can make life easier
The way you do mine
Save you some time
Alleviate a bit of stress from your mind
Help you relax
Let you recline babe
Then I should do it
Cause Heaven only knows
How much you have done
Now I see
It's the simple things
It's the simple things
It's the simple things
That say "I love you"
It's the simple things
It's the simple things
It's the simple things

[Verse 3]
Niggas from the hood is the best actors
We the ones that got to wear our face backwards
Put your frown on before they think you soft
Never smile long or take your defense off
Acting tough so much, we start to feel hard
Live from the city where they pull cards
I got a Glock 40 and a little nine
Ready for the day a nigga pull mine
Niggas from the hood is the best actors
Gotta learn to speak in ways that's unnatural
Just to make it through the job interviews
If my niggas heard me, they'd say
"Damn, what's gotten into you?"
Just trying to make it, dog, somehow
Peeking through the blinds, I see the sun now

In this verse, J. Cole talks about ‘hood politics’: the way in which things are handled in the ghetto.
- He cannot smile, because he has to appear tough.
- He always has a gun on him.
- He has to “learn English” for job interviews and set his African American Vernacular English aside.

Better days are coming.
I see you're still sleeping and it feels like
Maybe everything is gon' be alright
Better days are coming.

9. She's Mine, Pt. 2

[Intro]
Catch me, don't you
Catch me, don't you
Catch me, I've fallen in love for the first time

[Bridge]
For you I drop the tough guy shit, on this bus I sit
Thinking 'bout you, thinking 'bout you
Thinking 'bout you, thinking 'bout you
Thinking 'bout you, thinking 'bout you
Damn it feel good to have you
Damn it feel good to have you
Damn it feel good to have you
Damn it feel good to have you

[Verse 1]
Needin' me, wantin' me, givin' me a chance to feel special
To somebody in a world where they not lovin' me
Handcuffs keep huggin' the, wrists of my niggas
And I wish stuff was different here
But if I had a magic wand to make the evil disappear
That means that there would be no Santa Claus no more
To bring you Christmas cheer
'Cause what he represents is really greed
And the need to purchase shit from corporations
That make a killin' because they feed
On the wallets of the poor who be knockin' on they door
Every Black Friday just to get some shit they can't afford
Even with the discount, write a check, that shit bounce
But as long as we got credit, it don't matter, the amount
We just swipin' shit here, we don't love, we just likin' shit here
What's that smell? Where's your diaper shit here?
Lay on your back, don't pee right now
Or else I'll have to get you back
One day when you gon' want to get your way
Yeah I'll have fun with that
Reminisce when you came out the womb

Verse 1 is a comment on capitalism. Holidays like Christmas and Thanksgiving are purely excuses for companies to sell products. The sad thing is that these companies are well aware of the fact that there are poor people out there struggling: they are poor and being jailed.
Tears of joy I think filled up the room
You are now the reason that I fight
I ain’t never did nothing this right in my whole life
Got me thinking...

[Bridge]
Am I worthy of this gift?
Am I strong enough to lift? (Am I strong enough to lift?)
Into a place that I can see (Into a place that I can see)
Someone more important than me? (Someone more important than me?)
Am I worthy of this gift? (Am I worthy of this gift?)
Am I strong enough to lift (Am I strong enough to lift)
Into a place that I can see (Into a place that I can see)
Someone more important than me? (Someone more important than me?)

[Verse 2]
Ib gon’ ask me how I did this shit
I’m gon’ do a humble stunt act like I meant this shit
That’s the ego taking credit for what God made
Fuck this album shit, hey mama look what God made
(She’s mine) Catch me, don’t you
(She’s mine) Catch me, don’t you
(She’s mine) Catch me
I’ve fallen in love for the first time
I wanna cry, and I ain’t even tryna fight it
Don’t wanna die, ’cause now you’re here
And I just wanna be right by your side
On any night that you be cryin’, baby
I dry your eyes, I dry your eyes

[Outro]
There is a God, it is a God
Yeah, it is a God
I never felt so alive
I never felt so alive
I never felt so alive
(I never felt so alive)
I never felt so alive
(I never felt so alive)
Catch me, don’t you—
Catch me, don’t you—
Catch me, I’ve fallen in love for the first time

J. Cole wonders about why he was given the talent to rap.
10. 4 Your Eyez Only

[Intro: J. Cole]
Yeah (For your eyes)
For your eyes only (For your eyes)
For your eyes only, for your eyes only
(For your eyes, for your eyes)
For your eyes only

[Verse 1: J. Cole]
Hey,
niggas be dying on the daily
It seems my dreams faded for far too long
The consequences deadly
Can't visualize myself as nothing but a criminal
Control the block, serving up rocks and stay
subliminal
'Cause young niggas is hardheaded, they letting
off
Full of adrenaline, ignorant to what death can
cause
Ain't no coming back, family dressed in black
Plus it's hot now, the cops outside, it's hard to
flip a pack
And my daughter gotta eat, her mama be
stressing me
Like I ain't the one who put them Jays on her
feet
Like I ain't out in the field like that
I might be low for the moment but I will bounce
back
Despite the charges, back to the wall, I fight
regardless
Screaming, "Fuck the law," my life is lawless
That's what you call it, ain't got to be no psychic
To see this is like the farthest thing from heaven
This is hell and I don't mean that hyperbolic
I try to find employment even if it's wiping
toilets
But these felonies be making life the hardest
Resisting the temptation to run up and swipe a
wallet
Or run up on your yard, snatch your daughter
bike and pawn it
That's why I write this sonnet
If the pressure get too much for me to take and I
break
Play this tape for my daughter and let her know
my life is on it
(For your eyes) Let her know my life is on it
(For your eyes) For your eyes only

[Hook: J. Cole]
For your eyes, do you understand?
For your eyes, do you understand me?
For your eyes, do you understand?

Black people die daily in the ghetto.
He has lost hope long ago.

Society has molded him into a criminal.
He lists things that happen in the ghetto: looking
out for danger and dealing drugs.
If you get into a fight, people kill each other
easily without thinking of the consequences.

It is hard to sell drugs when the police is on the
lookout.
But he still has to feed his family.

He is not selling drugs at the moment.

He will fight, even while he has gotten in trouble
with the law.
Because he does not care about the law.

The ghetto is the opposite of Heaven: it is hell.

He cannot find jobs, so he will have to take on
anything that crosses his path.
The crimes that he committed are blocking his
opportunities, which makes him want to resort to
crime again and steal money or pimp out girls.
For your eyes, do you understand me?
For your eyes, do you understand?
For your eyes, do you understand me?
For your eyes, do you understand?
For your eyes only

[Verse 2: J. Cole]
You probably grown now so this song’ll hit you
If you hearing this, unfortunately means
That I’m no longer with you in the physical
Not even sure if I believe in God but because
you still alive
He got me praying that the spiritual is real
So I can be a part of you still, my pops was
killed too
So I know how part of you feels
Maybe you hate me, maybe you miss me, maybe
you spite me
Life goes in cycles, maybe you’ll date a nigga
just like me
I hope not, I'm tired of dope spots
And fiends that smoke rocks
I’ve seen far too many niggas’ hopes rot
I’m writing this because me and the devil had a
dance
Now I see death around the corner, ‘pologizing
in advance
Don’t know if I ever had a chance
At a glance, I’m a failure
Addicted to pushing paraphernalia
But Daddy had dreams once, my eyes had a
gleam once
Innocence disappeared by the age of eight years
My Pops shot up, drug-related, mama addicted
So Granny raised me in projects where thugs
was hanging
Blood was staining the concrete
Older niggas I loved talked like they was above
Maintaining a timesheet, that’s slow money
Picked up the family business by the age of
thirteen
Six years later was handed sentence
’Round the same time is when you came in this
world
Me and your mama thinking:
"What the fuck we naming this girl?"
I told her "Nina," the prettiest name that I could
think of
For the prettiest thing my eyes had ever seen, I
was nineteen
Took me two felonies to see the trap
This crooked-ass system set for me
And now I fear it's too late for me to ever be
The one that set examples that was never set for
me

You will understand what J. Cole is rapping
once you have grown older and spent your youth
in the ghetto.

J. Cole can relate to the narrative, because his
dad was killed too.

J. Cole is tired of seeing people sell drugs
and the hopelessness in the ghetto.

J. Cole has looked death in the eye.

You grow up quickly in the ghetto: his dad was
killed, his mother was addicted to drugs, and he
was raised by his grandmother where he hung
around with criminals.

People died in the streets.

Children take over the ‘family business’, which
is selling drugs.

They go to jail for it.

Teen parenthood.

He was arrested for selling/buying drugs.
I'm living fast, but not fast enough
’Cause karma keeps on catching up to me
And if my past becomes the death of me
I hope you understand

[Hook: J. Cole]
For your eyes, do you understand?
For your eyes, do you understand me?
For your eyes, do you understand?
For your eyes, do you understand me?
For your eyes, do you understand?
For your eyes, do you understand?
For your eyes only

[Verse 3: J. Cole]
It's several ways I could've went out, too many
to count
Was it the trigger happy crackers that the badges
give clout?
Was it the young niggas, blasting frustrated
‘Cause the cash running out?
Niggas don't know how to act in a drought
See, baby girl, I realized
My definition of a real nigga was skewed
My views misshaped by new mixtapes
That confirmed the shit I learned in the streets
was true
That real niggas don't speak when they beef with
you
They just pull up on your street, let the heat
achoo
And if a real nigga hungry, he gon' eat your food
I was a fool, spent all my time ducking school,
ducking cops
Ducking rules, hugging blocks that don't love
you
I pray you find a nigga with goals and point of
views
Much broader than the corner, if not it's gon'
corner you
Into a box, where your son don't even know his
pops
And the cyclical nature of doing time continues
My worst fear is one day that you come home
from school
And see your father face while hearing 'bout
tragedy on news
I got the strangest feeling your daddy gonna lose
his life soon
And sadly if you're listening now it must mean
it's true
But maybe there's a chance that it's not
And this album remains locked
In a hard drive like valuable jewels

He could have died multiple ways in the ghetto:
- The police could have killed him.
- Other black people in the ghetto could have killed him because they wanted his drugs/money.

He gained a lot of knowledge from living in the ghetto.
You do not get a second change in the ghetto: they shoot you immediately.

He regrets spending his time on crime rather than following an education.

Reference to himself.

The never-ending circle of mass incarceration of black people.
And I can teach you this in person
Like I'm teaching you to tie your own shoes
I love you and I hope to God I don't lose you
For your eyes only

[Hook: CharGaux & J. Cole]
For your eyes, for your eyes only
For your eyes, for your eyes only
For your eyes, do you understand?
For your eyes only

[Verse 4: J. Cole]
One day your daddy called me, told me he had a funny feeling
What he'd been dealing with lately, he wasn't telling
I tried to pick his brains, still he wasn't revealing
But I could feel the sense of panic in his voice
And it was chilling, he said:
"Jermaine, I knew you since we was children
I never asked for nothing, when times was hard
I never had discussions with you, begging you to help me"

I dealt with the repercussions of my actions
I know you tried to steer me 'way from that shit
But that shit was in my blood, you know my life
I know your momma, nigga, send my love
In case I never get a chance to speak again
I won't forget the weekends spent sleeping at your crib
That's the way I wished my family lived
But my granny crib was in the 'jects"
I had to interject like:
"Nigga, what you talking 'bout? Fuck is you getting at?"
He said, "Listen, I got no time to dive into descriptions"
But I been having premonitions
Just call it visions from the other side
I got a feeling I won't see tomorrow
Like the time I'm living on is borrowed
With that said, the only thing I'm proud to say, I was a father
Write my story down, and if I pass
Go play it for my daughter when she ready"
And so I'm leaving you this record, for your eyes only
Don't you ever scratch or disrespect it
This perspective is a real one, another lost 'Ville son
I dedicate these words to you and all the other children
Affected by the mass incarceration in this nation
That sent your pops to prison when he needed education

Crime comes with doing time.
J. Cole encouraged someone to stop doing crime but the other person argues it was in his blood: it is how he was brought up.

He thinks he might die soon.

Another (black) person that died in Fayetteville.

J. Cole comments on the institution of mass incarceration: it only worsens the situation.
Black people should be schooled not jailed.
Sometimes I think that segregation would've done us better
Although I know that means that I would never
Be brought into this world 'cause my daddy was so thrilled
When he found him a white girl to take back to Jonesboro
With 'lil Zach and Cole World, barely one years old

Now it's thirty years later, making sure this story's told
Girl, your daddy was a real nigga, not 'cause he was cold
Not because he was the first
To get some pussy twelve years old
Not because he used to come through
In the Caddy on some vogues
Not because he went from bagging up Them grams to serving O's
Nah, your daddy was a real nigga, not 'cause he was hard

Not because he lived a life of crime and sat behind some bars
Not because he screamed, "Fuck the law"
Although that was true
Your daddy was a real nigga cause he loved you
For your eyes only

He thinks black people would live better lives if segregation was still in place.

He wants to tell his life story through his music.

Drugs,

Things that happen in the ghetto: commit a crime and go to jail.
APPENDIX 7: J. COLE – BE FREE PERFORMANCE (2014)

Appendix 7 is an analysis of J. Cole’s performance of the song Be Free on the Late Show with David Letterman. The focus of the analysis is on the sociopolitical content of the performance. The lyrics are analyzed as this was a one-time-only performance and the song does not appear on any album. All lyrics have been acquired through Genius, an online database for lyrics and musical knowledge. The images provided below are screenshots of the performance and originate from a channel on YouTube called Letterman Videos.


“J. Cole Performing Be Free on Letterman.” YouTube, YouTube, 8 Nov. 2016, www.youtube.com/watch?v=DBPRq4sFqOI.

ANALYSIS

J. Cole – Be Free

[Verse 1]
And I'm in denial
And it don't take no X-Ray to see right through my smile
I know, I be on the go
And there ain't no drink out there that can numb my soul
Oh no

[Hook]
All we wanna do is take the chains off
All we wanna do is break the chains off
All we wanna do is be free
All we wanna do is be free
All we wanna do is take the chains off
All we wanna do is break the chains off
All we wanna do is be free
All we wanna do is be free

[Verse 2]
Can you tell me why
Every time I step outside I see my people die
I'm lettin' you know
That there ain't no gun they make that can kill my soul
Oh no

[Hook]
All we wanna do is take the chains off
All we wanna do is break the chains off
All we wanna do is be free
All we wanna do is be free
All we wanna do is take the chains off
All we wanna do is break the chains off
All we wanna do is be free
All we wanna do is be free

It is no secret that J. Cole is unhappy.

Alcohol does not even take the pain away anymore.

The African American community wants to be set free of racism and oppression in society.
Note the significance of the word ‘chains’, which can either relate to mass incarceration (handcuffs) or slavery.

J. Cole expresses his incomprehension of the fact that so many people are dying/killed in the ghetto.
J. Cole wants to make clear that he cannot be killed that easily.

The African American community wants to be set free of racism and oppression in society.
Note the significance of the word ‘chains’, which can either relate to mass incarceration (handcuffs) or slavery.
All we wanna do is be free

[Verse 3]
Forget this chain, cause this ain't me
Though I'm eternally grateful to Jay Z
We so elated, we celebrated like Obama waited
until his last day in office to tell the nation,
brothers is getting their reparations, hey
A man can dream, can't he?
No disrespect, in terms of change I haven't seen any
Maybe he had good intentions but was stifled by the system
And was sad to learn that he actually couldn't bring any
That's what I get for thinking, this world is fair
They let a brother steer the ship
And never told him that the ship was sinkin'
But I got other shit to think about, like my bank account
Forget that watch, you paid too much for it
You 'ought to be ashamed
When brothers back home be dreading when the seasons change
Cause they ain't got no heat and they ain't got no AC
WalMart distribution fired my homie, he just had a baby
You wonder why it's been so many B and E's lately
While brothers from the hood shooting like this is TNT lately
And since all the ballers leaving college early
I turn on the TV and don't see no brothers with degrees lately

[Bridge]
Are we all alone, fighting on our own
Please give me a chance, I don't wanna dance
Somethings got me down, I will stand my ground
Don't just stand around, don't just stand around

[Outro]
All we wanna do is be free
All we wanna do is be free
All we wanna do is take the chains off...

This chain refers to the gold necklaces rappers tend to wear.
Black people were very excited when an African American became the president of the USA.
They thought this would bring about change for black people, but it did not. They can only dream that one day it will happen, but it does not look like that right now.

Obama led the country, but the country was not doing well.
Everyday problems are more important.

African Americans are treated badly and live harsh lives:
- They live in poor homes.
- They get fired and are treated like numbers at work.

Crime.

TNT is a sports channel on TV. ‘Shooting’ and ‘ballers’ thus refer to basketball. It has a double layer, because it also represents shooting with guns (TNT as an explosive) and (black) basketball players who did not follow an education.

African Americans are left behind in society.
Racism and poverty are plaguing him, yet he want to encourage people to take action.

The African American community wants to be set free of racism and oppression in society.
Note the significance of the word ‘chains’, which can either relate to mass incarceration (handcuffs) or slavery.
The lyrics of *Be Free* present a fairly straightforward message. J. Cole’s performance live at David Letterman’s Late Show, however, shows more covert messages. The first important message is the sweater J. Cole is wearing (*Image 1*). The symbols on this sweater (F.$.S.❤.) represent the following message: “Fuck Money, Spread Love”. Cole thus believes people should be less concerned with money and capitalism, and pay more attention to spreading love and kindness among society.

The second thing that is of importance to his performance are Cole’s facial expressions. The viewer can truly see the anger and sadness in his eyes (*Images 2-3*). This adds an extra powerful and emotional dimension to the performance.
Image 3 – sadness
APPENDIX 8: J. COLE – NEIGHBORS MUSIC VIDEO (2017)

Appendix 8 is a visual analysis of J. Cole’s 2017 music video for the song Neighbors. The focus of the analysis is on the sociopolitical content of the video. The lyrics of Neighbors can be found in appendix 6.7. The images provided below are screenshots of the music video and originate from J. Cole’s VEVO channel on YouTube.


ANALYSIS

Instead of creating an entirely new music video for Neighbors, J. Cole chose to keep it simple: he chose the security footage of the event the song was based on. During the process of writing his album, J. Cole rented a house in a white neighborhood so he could use it as a recording studio. The (prejudiced and/or racist) neighbors called the police on him, as they thought he was selling drugs. An entire SWAT team came over to raid the house only to find nothing illegal (Image 1). Including footage of the raid adds to the realness and credibility of the song, but it also sends out a strong message about racial prejudices against black people. In Image 2 it can be seen that the SWAT team made it all the way to the back of the house, busted a door down, and there is nothing to be found (Image 2). The last image shows one of the SWAT members trying to knock down the camera in order to get rid of the recordings of this embarrassing operation (Image 3).

IMAGES
Image 1 – SWAT team

Image 2 – the door is busted

Image 3 – the SWAT member turns off the camera