



*Painting by Danny O'Connor*

# HIP HOP MATTERS

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

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## 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

|  |     |
|--|-----|
| Title Page.....  | 1   |
| Cover Sheet .....  | 2   |
| Acknowledgements .....   | 3   |
| Abstract .....   | 4   |
| Introduction .....   | 7   |
| Research Question, Sub-questions, and Hypothesis.....                                | 7   |
| Defining the Research Question .....   | 9   |
| Literature .....   | 10  |
| Methodology.....   | 11  |
| Chapter 1: The Intersection Between Hip Hop and Protest .....                        | 13  |
| 1.1 Music and Protest .....  | 13  |
| 1.2 Hip Hop and Protest .....  | 14  |
| 1.3 N.W.A. and Public Enemy .....  | 16  |
| Chapter 2: The #BlackLivesMatter Movement.....                                       | 21  |
| 2.1 Origin and Strategy.....   | 21  |
| 2.2 Rhetoric .....   | 22  |
| 2.3 Political Results .....  | 24  |
| Chapter 3: Themes in Hip Hop from the #BlackLivesMatter Era .....                    | 26  |
| 3.1 Kendrick Lamar.....  | 26  |
| 3.2 J. Cole .....  | 31  |
| Chapter 4: The Relation Between BLM and Contemporary Hip Hop .....                   | 35  |
| 4.1 Similarities.....  | 35  |
| 4.2 Differences.....   | 36  |
| Conclusion.....  | 38  |
| Bibliography.....  | 40  |
| Appendix .....   | 43  |
| Appendix 1: N.W.A. – Straight Outta Compton (1988) .....                             | 44  |
| Appendix 2: Public Enemy – It Takes A Nation Of Millions To Hold Us Back (1988)..... | 78  |
| Appendix 3: Kendrick Lamar – To Pimp a Butterfly (2015).....                         | 103 |
| Appendix 4: Kendrick Lamar – <i>Alright</i> Music Video (2015).....                  | 150 |
| Analysis.....  | 150 |
| Images .....   | 152 |
| Appendix 5: Kendrick Lamar – Grammy Awards Performance (2016).....                   | 157 |

|  |     |
|--|-----|
| Analysis.....  | 157 |
| Images .....   | 158 |
| Appendix 6: J. Cole – 4 Your Eyez Only (2016).....             | 161 |
| Appendix 7: J. Cole – <i>Be Free</i> Performance (2014).....   | 183 |
| Analysis.....  | 183 |
| Images .....   | 185 |
| Appendix 8: J. Cole – <i>Neighbors</i> Music Video (2017)..... | 187 |
| Analysis.....  | 187 |
| Images .....   | 187 |

## 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

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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.

## LITERATURE

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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

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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

(Damodaran, 4). 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 (Aldridge, 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

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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

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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 (Pettit 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

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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.

## CHAPTER 3: THEMES IN HIP HOP 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:

*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* (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 overflowed 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

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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.♥.’ 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 hots and a cot” (J. Cole, appendix 6.2). “Three hots 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 aggravated 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 mentioned above. 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.

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## APPENDIX

## 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/](https://genius.com/).

## 1. Straight Outta Compton

|   |  |
|---|--|
| <p><b>[Intro: Dr. Dre]</b><br/>         You are now about to witness the strength of street knowledge</p>   | <p>The listener is invited to engage with knowledge (about racism) obtained by living in the streets of Compton.</p>   |
| <p><b>[Verse 1: Ice Cube]</b><br/>         Straight outta Compton, crazy motherfucker<br/>         named Ice Cube<br/>         From the gang called Niggas Wit Attitudes<br/>         When I'm called off, I got a sawed-off<br/>         Squeeze the trigger and bodies are hauled off<br/>         You too, boy, if you fuck with me<br/>         The police are gonna have to come and get me<br/>         Off your ass, that's how I'm going out<br/>         For the punk motherfuckers that's showing out<br/>         Niggas start to mumble, they wanna rumble<br/>         Mix 'em and cook 'em in a pot, like gumbo<br/>         Going off on the motherfucker like that<br/>         With a gat that's pointed at your ass<br/>         So give it up smooth<br/>         Ain't no telling when I'm down for a jack move<br/>         Here's a murder rap to keep y'all dancin'<br/>         With a crime record like Charles Manson<br/>         AK-47 is the tool<br/>         Don't make me act a motherfucking fool<br/>         Me you can go toe to toe, no maybe<br/>         I'm knocking niggas out the box, daily<br/>         Yo, weekly, monthly and yearly<br/>         Until them dumb motherfuckers see clearly<br/>         That I'm down with the capital C-P-T<br/>         Boy, you can't fuck with me<br/>         So when I'm in your neighborhood, you better<br/>         duck<br/>         'Cause Ice Cube is crazy as fuck<br/>         As I leave, believe I'm stompin'<br/>         But when I come back boy, I'm coming straight<br/>         outta Compton<br/>         (Compton Compton Compton)</p> | <p>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.</p> <p>Relating to weapons and gun violence.</p> <p>First time the word 'police' is mentioned on the album.</p> <p>The N-word is considered incredibly disrespectful. It is, however, "accepted" by the black community if it is uttered by a black person.</p> <p>Famous American murderer.<br/>A weapon.</p> <p>Duality in the word 'down': he is solidary with Compton (C-P-T), but also sad about Compton.</p> <p>Madness.</p> |
| <p><b>[Interlude: Eazy E (MC Ren)]</b><br/>         Yo, Ren! (Whassup?)<br/>         Tell 'em where you from!</p>   | <p>Taking pride in being from Compton, but also using it to claim agency.</p>  |
| <p><b>[Verse 2: MC Ren]</b><br/>         Straight outta Compton, another crazy ass nigga</p>  |  |

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  
 But I don't give a fuck, I'ma 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'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]**

Fuck tha police!  
 Fuck tha police!  
 Fuck tha police!  
 Fuck 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 fucked 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 motherfuckin' 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  
 But I'ma smoke them now and not next time  
 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 motherfuckin' 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 motherfuckin' 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!

The police say/do unjust things.

Racism: the complexity of his face provokes negative connotations.

Mocking the policemen's authority.

The redneck stereotype is often associated with racism. The police is thus prosecuted for racism.

The police says this to the rappers.

### 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 mothafucka from around the  
way

Since I was a youth, I smoked weed out

Now I'm the mothafucka 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 mothafuckin' 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'?

Crime, perhaps black-on-black violence.

**[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'

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-  
 fo'  
 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)

MC Ren talks about the relativity of N.W.A.'s music.

The "villain" according to society is the African American.

It is assumed that all gangsters are black.

**[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  
 Aiiyo Dre, where's you gonna take this shit  
 man?

**[Verse 2: Dr. Dre]**

Aiiyo, **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

Takes the listener outside where the action is happening.

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-ding-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}

Exerting agency through stating the place where they are.

8 ball is one of the balls in a pool game.  
However, in urban slang, this means grams of cocaine.

A weapon.

A bottle of liquor.

This is said to the police.  
Cocaine.

“Fucked up” is urban slang for being under the influence of alcohol or drugs.

There is truth in what Eazy-E has to say because he was raised in L.A.

**[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

[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]  
 Alright, 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

They are representing Compton.

They are representing Compton.

[Verse 2: MC Ren]

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]**

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

He is equipped with a gun.

He does not like to abide by the law.

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  
 apartment  
 So open your door, by the way, so we can start  
 it  
 Test the monitors and call this mic  
 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  
one  
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  
to follow  
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.

### Parental Guidance.

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...

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

**[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



**[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  
Pump it up, pump it up  
Yeah, who's in the mothafucking house right now?  
Pump that shit up  
Yeah, **Compton's definitely in the house**  
Hey yo Ren, what we're gonna do?

N.W.A. are representatives of Compton.

N.W.A. is here.

**[Verse 1: MC Ren & Dr. Dre + Eazy-E]**

To the people over here  
To the people over there  
To the people, the people, the people, people,  
the people, the people, people  
From everywhere watching the show  
Paying top dollars 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'

A weapon.

**[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

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  
 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 muthafuckers 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.

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 a 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 really 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.



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]** An addict/junky.  
**[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 someboy 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

People are even selling their bodies for drugs.

## [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

Cocaine.

## Drugs.





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  
Rythmatic 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 convincing  
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 sssssssss - 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 dont 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/](https://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!

**[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

**[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 'till 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 illin', we chillin'  
Yo P.E. in the house, top billin'  
Yo Chuck, show em what you can do, boy

**[Verse 3]**

Get from in front of me, the crowd runs to me  
My DJ is warm, he's X, I call him Norm, ya  
know  
He can cut a record from side to side  
So what, the ride, the glide should be much  
safer than a suicide  
Soul control, beat is the father of your rock'n'roll  
Music for whatcha, for whichin', you call a  
band, man

Empowering black people to win the race battle.

Racism.

This song will teach you things (about society).

The brothers and sisters are other black people  
in America.

This section talks about how Public Enemy's  
music is not generally accepted. Black radio  
stations are even wary of playing their music.





### 3. Don't Believe the Hype

#### [Intro: Flavor Flav + Sample]

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—

Don't believe the hype

Don't—

Don't—

Don't—

Don't believe the hype

#### [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

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.





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

(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.

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

#### 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  
 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

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

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  
 Supercalafrahestikalagoothki  
 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 (x6)

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

Very strong political statement.

**[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

Judgement Day/Jesus Christ.

**[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 ruler ready to jam  
But his cuts drive against the belt  
Shit...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]**

Statement against the police.

He (a black man) is the country's most wanted criminal.

## 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!) (Yeah!)  
 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 Malcom 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!)  
(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

Wiretapping his telephone.

He wants the listener to take the lyrics into  
account, because it is educational.  
The black race is paying the price in society.  
The black man's life is uncertain.

The year the song was published: everything the  
listener hears is happening right now.

They are still tapping his phone.  
He is considered deadly to society (even when  
he is unarmed), because his resistance leads to  
unrest.

Rapping is educating people about current  
affairs.

The government tells society lies, but the  
authorities keep spying on/accusing 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?

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

### [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?

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.

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?

He is accused of being violent, but he demands 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

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

## 9. Show 'Em Watcha Got

**[Intro]**

Freedom is a road seldom traveled by the  
multitude

Freedom is not self-evident.

**[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 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-  
The same God that gave wisdom to Winnie  
Mandela  
Stay strong sister  
Brothers and sisters, please, join with me to  
welcome, and listen here

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  
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.

**[Hook]****[Flavor Flav]**

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!

**[Verse 3: Chuck D]**

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

**[Refrain]****[Hook]****[Flavor Flav]**

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

**[Repeat intro]**

The TV is keeping her dumb.  
 The rapper believes revolution is the only right  
 way out.

He suggests the girl read a book to educate  
 herself.

**11. Night of the Living Baseheads****[Intro]**

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

**[Verse 1 - Chuck D]**

Here it is, BAM!

A crack addict.

A reference to the history of slavery: how they  
 were brought to the Americas from Africa and  
 how they were anglicized.

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**

A wordplay on drugs.

**[Professor Griff]**

**Succotash** is a means for kids to make cash  
**Selling drugs** to the brother man instead of the  
other man

Making money through sexual acts/prostitution.  
There is a drug problem in the neighborhood.

**[Chuck D]**

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

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!)

This song is written from the state prison.

**[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

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

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

The United States does not care about the black  
race.

I wasn't with it but just that very minute it  
occurred to me

**The suckers had authority**

Yet, they are still the ones ruining the country.

Cold sweating as I dwell in my cell, how long  
has it been?

They got me sitting in the **state pen**

The state penitentiary.

I gotta get out, but that thought was thought  
before

**I contemplated a plan on the cell floor**

A plan to escape prison.

I'm not a fugitive on the run

But a brother like me begun to be another one

**Public enemy serving time**

He is serving time in prison.

They drew the line y'all, to criticize me some  
crime

Nevertheless, **they could not understand that I'm**  
**a Black man**

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

**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**

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 its 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?

There are four other “criminals” in the same cell. It is compared to slavery.

The organization of devils is the government.

The problem is the government.

He does not keep track of the times he has been in prison anymore. It has become countless, and with that useless. It is clear that he (the black race) is not considered a part of society or a citizen with rights.

Weapons are a part of his escape plan.

One of the supervisors fell asleep, providing the rapper with the chance to steal the supervisor's gun and put them under pressure.

He claims he is innocent. It is just the government that believes he is guilty (i.e. guilty for demonstrating).

In times of slavery, slaves escaped to the North in order to (re)gain freedom.

There is an uprising in the prison.

The rapper asserts that it has to go this far in order to reach peace.

African Americans stand up for each other.  
They are, however, returning to the ghetto...

He is not going to kill the COs because he is decent.

Prison is awful. It hurts you.

He shot her.



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

The weapon.

**[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 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

Allusion to the movie *Rebel Without a Cause*.

**[Intro]**

Brothers and sisters  
 Brothers and sisters, **I don't know what this**  
**world's coming to**

He is expressing his concerns about what has become of humanity.

**[Verse 1: Chuck D]**

Yes - the rhythm, **the rebel**  
**Without a pause** - I'm lowering my level  
 The hard rhymers - **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 rebels non-stop.

He has experienced (bad) things that most people will likely (and hopefully) never experience.

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

He is calling for impeachment of the president.

Wordplay. The public enemy in this case is the black race as a group.

They are on a mission to better African American lives.

We showin' up in E-F-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.

The leader of resistance.

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 say)  
 You're quite hostile

The leader of resistance.

The information people are provided with is false. People should learn more about themselves by themselves.

Black people are doomed to this fate.  
 Nelson Mandela: anti-Apartheid leader.  
 Margaret Thatcher: British Minister. This statement is a warning that the resistance is on its way.

**16. Party For Your Right to Fight**

*Fight For Your Right (to Party) – Beastie Boys*

**[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.

*Genius / Song Lyrics & Knowledge*, Genius Media Group Inc., 2018, [genius.com/](https://genius.com/).

## 1. Wesley's Theory

|  |  |
|--|--|
| <p>[Produced by Flying Lotus &amp; Ronald "Flippa" Colson<br/>Additional production by Sounwave &amp; Thundercat]</p> <p>[Sample: Boris Gardiner]<br/>Every nigga is a star, ayy, every nigga is a star<br/>Every nigga is a star, ayy, every nigga is a star<br/>Every nigga is a star, ayy</p> <p>Who will deny that you and I and every nigger is<br/>a star?</p> <p>[Intro: Josef Leimberg]<br/>Hit me!</p> <p>When the four corners of this cocoon collide<br/>You'll slip through the cracks hopin' that you'll<br/>survive</p> <p>Gather your wit, take a deep look inside<br/>Are you really who they idolize?<br/>To pimp a butterfly</p> <p>[Chorus: Kendrick Lamar]<br/>At first, I did love you<br/>But now I just wanna fuck<br/>Late nights thinkin' of you<br/>Until I get my nut<br/>Tossed and turned, lesson learned<br/>You was my first girlfriend<br/>Bridges burned, all across the board<br/>Destroyed, but what for?</p> <p>[Verse 1: Kendrick Lamar]<br/>When I get signed, homie, I'ma act a fool<br/>Hit the dance floor, strobe lights in the room<br/>Snatch your little secretary bitch for the homies<br/>Blue-eyed devil with a fat-ass monkey<br/>I'ma buy a brand new Caddy on fours<br/>Trunk the hood up, two times, deuce-four<br/>Platinum on everythin', platinum on weddin' ring<br/>Married to the game and a bad bitch chose<br/>When I get signed, homie, I'ma buy a strap<br/>Straight from the CIA, set it on my lap<br/>Take a few M-16s to the hood<br/>Pass 'em all out on the block, what's good?</p> | <p>The sample suggests there is a prejudice that all black people are stars or rappers.</p> <p>Reference to 'butterfly': a metaphor for the beauty of an artist's work. The cocoon is a metaphor for the ghetto.<br/>'To pimp a butterfly' means artists are being exploited by the music industry. These lines a a reference to that.</p> <p>Fantasizing about getting a contract at a record label.</p> <p>Fantasizing about getting a contract at a record label. A 'strap' is a slang term for a gun. A rifle.</p> |
|--|--|

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.



|  |   |
|--|---|
| <p>Your horoscope is a gemini, two sides<br/>         So you better cop everything two times<br/>         Two coupes, two chains, <b>two C-notes</b><br/>         Too much ain't enough, both we know<br/>         Christmas, tell 'em what's on your wish list<br/>         Get it all, you deserve it, Kendrick<br/>         And when you hit the White House, do you<br/>         But remember, you ain't pass economics in<br/>         school<br/> <b>And everything you buy, taxes will deny</b><br/> <b>I'll Wesley Snipe your ass before thirty-five</b></p> <p>[Bridge: George Clinton &amp; Kendrick Lamar]<br/>         Yeah, lookin' down, it's quite a drop (It's quite a<br/>         drop, drop, drop)<br/>         Lookin' good when you're on top (When you're<br/>         on top, you got it)<br/>         You got a medal for us<br/>         Leavin' metaphors metaphysically in a state of<br/>         euphoria<br/>         Look both ways before you cross my mind</p> <p>[Refrain: Thundercat &amp; George Clinton]<br/>         We should've never gave<br/>         We should've never gave niggas money<br/>         Go back home, money, go back home<br/>         We should've never gave<br/>         We should've never gave niggas money<br/>         Go back home, money, go back home</p> <p>[Outro]<br/> <b>Tax man comin', tax man comin'</b><br/> <b>Tax man comin', tax man comin'</b><br/> <b>Tax man comin', tax man comin'</b><br/> <b>Tax man comin', tax man comin'</b></p> | <p>Slang for a one hundred dollar bill.</p> <p>Wesley Snipes is an American actor who<br/>         committed tax fraud.</p> <p>American capitalism.</p> |
|--|---|

## 2. For Free? (Interlude)

|   |  |
|---|--|
| <p>[Produced by Terrace Martin]</p> <p>[Intro: Darlene Tibbs]<br/>         Fuck you, motherfucker, you a ho-ass <b>nigga</b><br/>         I don't know why you trying to go big, nigga,<br/>         you ain't shit<br/>         Walking around like you God's gift to Earth,<br/>         nigga, you ain't shit<br/>         You ain't even buy me no outfit for the <b>fourth</b><br/>         I need that Brazilian, wavy, twenty-eight inch,<br/>         you playin'<br/>         I shouldn't be fuckin' with you anyway<br/>         I need a baller-ass, boss-ass nigga<br/>         You's a off-brand-ass nigga, everybody know it<br/>         Your homies know it, everybody fuckin' know<br/>         Fuck you, nigga, don't call me no more</p> | <p>The N-word is very rude. Black people tolerate<br/>         the word when said by blacks, but not by whites.</p> <p>The Fourth of July: Independence Day.</p> |
|---|--|

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.

[Outro]  
I'ma get my **Uncle Sam** to fuck you up  
You ain't no king

Metaphor for the United States.

### 3. **King Kunta**

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

[Produced by Sounwave; Additional production  
by Terrace Martin]

[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?)

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.

[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

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

Drugs.

[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  
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.  
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.

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)

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  
Zoom, zoom, zoom, shit

[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 surprises.  
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.

[Outro: 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, 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

[Produced by Terrace Martin & Larrance  
 Dopson; Additional production by Sounwave]  
 [Directed by Colin Tilley & The Little Homies]

[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-  
 Sex

Lamar is going to abuse his power in this song.  
 He does, however, know he was wrong in doing  
 so.

The abuse starts with 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

Sex.

[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

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 is in jail and wants to get out.

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

[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—

[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

Lamar's teen sister is pregnant.

Lamar feels like he is a failure.

Depressed thoughts.

|   |   |
|---|---|
| <p>[Bridge: Kendrick Lamar]<br/>         Lovin' you, lovin' you, not lovin' you, 100°<br/>         proof<br/>         (I can feel your vibe and recognize that you're<br/>         ashamed of me<br/>         Yes, I hate you, too)</p>   | <p>He is ashamed of himself and hates himself.</p>  |
| <p>[Break: Jessica Vielmas]<br/>         (Loving you ain't really complicated)<br/>         House keeping, house keeping<br/>         (What I got to do to get to you?)<br/>         ¡Abre la puerta! ¡Abre la puerta tengo que<br/>         limpiar el cuarto!<br/>         (To you)<br/>         ¡Es que no hay mucho tiempo tengo que limpiar<br/>         el cuarto!<br/>         (Loving you ain't really complicated)<br/>         ¡Disculpe!<br/>         (What I got to do to get to you?)<br/>         (To you)</p>  | <p>The Spanish lyrics hint at the multiculturalism of the ghetto.</p>   |
| <p>[Verse 2]<br/>         You the reason why mama and them leavin'<br/>         No, you ain't shit, you say you love them<br/>         I know you don't mean it<br/>         I know you're irresponsible, selfish, in denial,<br/>         can't help it<br/>         Your trials and tribulations a burden, everyone<br/>         felt it<br/>         Everyone heard it, multiple shots, corners cryin'<br/>         out<br/>         You was deserted, where was your antennas<br/>         again?<br/>         Where was your presence?<br/>         Where was your support that you pretend?<br/>         You ain't no brother, you ain't no disciple<br/>         You ain't no friend<br/>         A friend never leave Compton for profit<br/>         Or leave his best friend, little brother<br/>         You promised you'd watch him before they shot<br/>         him<br/>         Where was your antennas?<br/>         On the road, bottles and bitches<br/>         You FaceTimed him one time, that's unforgiving<br/>         You even FaceTimed instead of a hospital visit<br/>         Guess you thought he would recover well<br/>         Third surgery, they couldn't stop the bleeding<br/>         for real<br/>         Then he died, God himself will say, "You<br/>         fuckin' failed"<br/>         You ain't try</p> | <p>He blames himself for the fact that his mother is leaving him.</p> <p>Trials in court.</p> <p>Gun violence.</p> <p>Ghetto.</p> <p>He is haunted by guilt because he did not visit his friend who later died in hospital.</p> |
| <p>[Verse 3]<br/>         I know your secrets, nigga</p>  |   |

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**

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

Everything will be okay.

[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**

Everything will be okay.

He wants the black population to hear it: everything will be okay.

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 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 mamma 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 can 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, 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

[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)  
**(I need you more than you know)**

[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)

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

[Verse 2: Kendrick Lamar]

This section suggests Lamar is doubting his career.

He is scared of what is to come, so someone tells him to go to church. But beware: the devil knows the Bible as well.

Slang term for marijuana.

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

Temptation.

Capitalism.

The devil (music industry) has Lamar under his spell.

Marijuana.

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.

Marijuana.

Temptation.

Temptation.

The poem continues. Lamar resents some of the things he has done. It gave him a deep and dark

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  
 Kendrick is master that mastered it

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

[Hook]

We been waitin' for you  
 Waitin' for you

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  
 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,  
 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  
 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.

[Verse 1: Kendrick Lamar]

I don't give a fuck about no politics in rap, my  
nigga  
My lil homie Stunna Deuce ain't never comin'  
back, my nigga  
So you better go hard every time you jump on  
wax, my nigga  
Fuck what they talkin' 'bout, your shit is where  
it's at, my nigga  
Came in this game, you stuck your fangs in this  
game  
You wore no chain in this game, your hood,  
your name in this game  
Now you double up, time to bubble up the bread  
and huddle up  
Stickin' to the scripts, now here if them  
Benjamins go cuddle up  
Skip, hop, drip, drop, flip, flop with the white  
tube sock  
It goes "Sherm Sticks, burn this"  
That's what the product smell like when the  
chemicals mix  
50 nigga salute, out the Compton zoo, with the  
extras  
El Cos, Monte Carlos, Road Kings and dressers  
Rip Ridaz, P-Funkers, Mexicans, they fuck with  
you  
Asians, they fuck with you, nobody can fuck  
with you

[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  
On the dead homies

[Verse 2: Kendrick Lamar]

Hopped out the Caddy, just got my dick sucked  
The little homies called and said, "the enemies  
done cliqued up"  
Oh, yeah? "Puto want to squabble with mi  
barrio?"  
Oh, yeah? Tell 'em they can run it for the cardio  
Oh, yeah? Everythin' is everythin', it's  
scandalous  
Slow motion for the ambulance, the project  
filled with cameras  
The LAPD gamblin', scramblin', football  
numbers slanderin'

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  
and Re-Blood-licans  
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  
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

[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)

[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 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  
 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 Todd's, 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, jigga boos 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

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.

### 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...

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 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  
 Reciprocation 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  
 Katzkings 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 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 still 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 starts 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]

He hates everyone in America.  
 America hates him back.

He knows America hates black people because  
 they keep shooting at black people.  
 They actually have bad intentions.

Two tribes fighting refer to two gangs fighting,  
 and black people and America fighting.  
 Here he describes gang riots and only death can  
 decide who wins.

The Black Panther Party was a militant African  
 American organization.  
 Garvey fought for black rights.  
 February is Black History Month in the US.  
 Lamar thinks it is hypocritical.  
 Black stereotypes.

Lamar finally reveals why he is a hypocrite: he  
 is sad about the killing of Trayvon Martin, but  
 he killed black people in the ghetto too...

#### 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 hoies 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

Lamar turns the conversation around: his friends only try to stereotype him when he is back. He tries to tell them all the stereotypes are untrue. He even compares such statements to the police, who stereotype black people as well.

The world does not respect black people and neither does the USA.

Reference to court.

Lamar wants to tell people how it really is.

Lamar turns the conversation around: his friends only try to stereotype him when he is back. He

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.

## 15. i

[Produced by Rahki]  
 [Directed by Alexandre Moors and the Little  
     Homies]

[Original Intro]  
 Is this mic on? (Hey, move this way, this way)

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?  
 When shit hit the 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?

[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

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?  
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?  
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?

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

He asks his fans: what will happen when he  
were to go to jail, if he did not have a contract, if  
people wanted him dead? Would they judge him  
or stand by him?

Lamar's positive message should set the people  
free and encourage them to do something about  
their fate.

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.

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 situa-  
 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.

The people at the bottom of society are going to stop the evil: the government, the rich, etc.

Comparison.

Black will take over.

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'ma  
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: KENDRICK LAMAR – *ALRIGHT* MUSIC VIDEO (2015)

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.

Lamar, Kendrick. "KendrickLamarVEVO." *YouTube*, YouTube, 30 June 2015, [www.youtube.com/channel/UCoYfzC2zMlc9M-Odgaf6OSg](http://www.youtube.com/channel/UCoYfzC2zMlc9M-Odgaf6OSg).

## 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.

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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.

Lamar, Kendrick. "Watch Kendrick Lamar's Stunning Performance from the 2016 Grammys." *The Verge*, The Verge, 16 Feb. 2016, [www.theverge.com/2016/2/15/11004624/grammys-2016-watch-kendrick-lamar-perform-alright-the-blacker-the-berry](http://www.theverge.com/2016/2/15/11004624/grammys-2016-watch-kendrick-lamar-perform-alright-the-blacker-the-berry).

## 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.

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#### IMAGES



*Image 1 – Lamar walks out in chains with other black men*



*Image 2 – other black men are jailed*





*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*



## APPENDIX 6: J. COLE – 4 YOUR EYEZ ONLY (2016)

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.

*Genius / Song Lyrics & Knowledge*, Genius Media Group Inc., 2018, [genius.com/](https://genius.com/).

## 1. For Whom the Bell Tolls

|   |  |
|---|--|
| <p>[Intro]</p> <p>I see the, I see the—<br/> I see the, I see the—<br/> I see the rain<br/> Pouring down<br/> Before my very eyes<br/> Should come as no surprise<br/> I see the, I see the rain<br/> Pouring down, uh<br/> Before my very eyes<br/> Should come as no surprise</p>   | <p>Depressed image.</p>  |
| <p>[Verse]</p> <p>I'm searching and praying and hoping for<br/> something<br/> I know I'm gon' see it, I know that it's coming<br/> Lord, huh<br/> Lord, huh<br/> But what do you do when there's no place to<br/> turn?<br/> I have no one, I'm lonely, my bridges have burnt<br/> down<br/> Lord<br/> Lord</p>  | <p>He wants to look towards the future, but he cannot.<br/> He does, however, know a better future is out there somewhere.<br/> He does not have anywhere to go.<br/> He is lonely and his relationships have failed, perhaps because of his career.</p> |
| <p>[Chorus]</p> <p>The bells getting loud, ain't nowhere to hide<br/> Got nowhere to go, put away my pride<br/> Tired of feeling low even when I'm high<br/> Ain't no way to live, do I wanna die?<br/> I don't know, I don't know<br/> Bells getting loud, ain't nowhere to hide<br/> Got nowhere to go, put away my pride<br/> Tired of feeling low even when I'm high<br/> Ain't no way to live, do I wanna die?<br/> I don't know, I don't know</p> | <p>Bells ring when someone dies. He thinks his end is near. He is really depressed, even under the influence of drugs.<br/> He is contemplating suicide.</p>   |
| <p>[Outro]</p> <p>Bells gettin' louder, louder<br/> I see the rain<br/> Pouring down</p>  |  |

## 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 hot's 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

Form on the block

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 hot's 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  
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 Sniffing cocaine.  
 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

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

Time in jail.

[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—

His father was killed and taken advantage of.

[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

Black pride.

[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"

## 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

... leave her side.

[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?

A reference to J. Cole's tough past. It has made him who he is today.

Another reference to his youth. His dad and multiple friends died (or were killed).

[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  
 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 &amp; 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  
 scam  
 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 contradictive. 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  
 We know he's in a better place  
 But this has got to end, ladies and gentleman  
 We've got to come together, this is—this is  
 beyond words  
 Now I'd like to open this ceremony with a verse  
 fro—

## 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]

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  
 Apologize if I'm harpin' 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

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.

[Hook]

Okay, the neighbors think I'm sellin' dope  
 Hm, I guess the neighbors think I'm sellin' dope  
 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

[Verse 2]

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

[Bridge]

Don't follow me  
Don't follow me  
Don't follow me  
Don't follow me

[Hook]

Okay, the neighbors think I'm sellin' dope  
 Hm, I guess the neighbors think I'm sellin' dope,  
 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

[Outro]

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 that for me  
 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  
 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.





## 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  
stressin' 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 me?  
 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.



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.

*Genius / Song Lyrics & Knowledge*, Genius Media Group Inc., 2018, [genius.com/](https://genius.com/).

"J. Cole Performing Be Free on Letterman." YouTube, YouTube, 8 Nov. 2016, [www.youtube.com/watch?v=DBPRq4sFqOI](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DBPRq4sFqOI).

## ANALYSIS

| J. Cole – <i>Be Free</i>   |  |
|--|--|
| [Verse 1]<br>And I'm in denial<br>And it don't take no X-Ray to see right through<br>my smile<br>I know, I be on the go<br>And there ain't no drink out there that can numb<br>my soul<br>Oh no  | It is no secret that J. Cole is unhappy.<br><br>Alcohol does not even take the pain away anymore.  |
| [Hook]<br>All we wanna do is take the chains off<br>All we wanna do is break the chains off<br>All we wanna do is be free<br>All we wanna do is be free<br>All we wanna do is take the chains off<br>All we wanna do is break the chains off<br>All we wanna do is be free<br>All we wanna do is be free | 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. |
| [Verse 2]<br>Can you tell me why<br>Every time I step outside I see my people die<br>I'm lettin' you know<br>That there ain't no gun they make that can kill<br>my soul<br>Oh no   | J. Cole expresses his incomprehension of the fact that so many people are dying/killed in the ghetto.<br>J. Cole wants to make clear that he cannot be killed that easily.                                 |
| [Hook]<br>All we wanna do is take the chains off<br>All we wanna do is break the chains off<br>All we wanna do is be free<br>All we wanna do is be free<br>All we wanna do is take the chains off<br>All we wanna do is break the chains off<br>All we wanna do is be free                               | 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.

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#### IMAGES



*Image 1 - F.\$S.♥.*



*Image 2 – anger*



*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.

Cole, J. "J. Cole - Neighbors." YouTube, YouTube, 1 May 2017, [www.youtube.com/watch?v=9nfVWiXY3WY](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9nfVWiXY3WY).

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 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*).

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 IMAGES



*Image 1 – SWAT team*



*Image 2 – the door is busted*



*Image 3 – the SWAT member turns off the camera*