

Hip hop voices in the era of Mass Incarceration: An examination of Kendrick Lamar and
The Black Lives Matter Movement

Patrick Jeremiah Salmons

Thesis submitted to the faculty of the Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts
In
Political Science

Rohan Kalyan
Brandy S. Faulkner
Ellington Graves

4/28/17
Blacksburg, Virginia

Keywords: hip hop, rap, Mass Incarceration, oppression, Police brutality, Black
liberation, The Black Lives Matter Movement, individual rights, social contract, pop
culture, Kendrick Lamar

Hip hop voices in the era of Mass Incarceration: An examination of Kendrick Lamar and The Black Lives Matter Movement

Patrick Salmons

ABSTRACT

The United States has many problems currently, the most persistent of which is the issue of race, and the problem of Mass Incarceration. This thesis addresses what Mass Incarceration is, as well as developing a theoretical understanding of how to overcome Mass Incarceration through the music of Kendrick Lamar and The Black Lives Matter Movement. This thesis presents the questions: What is the era of Mass Incarceration? How does Kendrick Lamar's music inform the problems of Mass Incarceration? How does The Black Lives Matter Movement use this information to create a solidarity movement against the oppression of African Americans? What does this mean going forward? Creating a synthesis of Mass Incarceration, the music of Kendrick Lamar, and The Black Lives Matter Movement, that overlaps and propels an intersection of culture and activism that inform one another. This all leads to the main takeaway of the thesis, that attempts to provide an interpretive understanding that pop culture, social media, and activism have created a different civil sphere, a Black public sphere that informs and educates through different avenues. All in all this thesis shows that music, social movements, and policy are all interconnected, and the music of Kendrick Lamar and the activism of The Black Lives Matter Movement provide a catalyst for change in the era of Mass Incarceration.

Hip hop voices in the era of Mass Incarceration: An examination of Kendrick Lamar and The Black Lives Matter Movement

Patrick Salmons

GENERAL AUDIENCE ABSRACT

The United States has many problems currently, the most persistent of which is the issue of race, and the problem of Mass Incarceration. This thesis addresses what Mass Incarceration is, as well as developing a theoretical understanding of how to overcome Mass Incarceration through the music of Kendrick Lamar and The Black Lives Matter Movement. This thesis presents the questions: What is the era of Mass Incarceration? How does Kendrick Lamar's music inform the problems of Mass Incarceration? How does The Black Lives Matter Movement use this information to create a solidarity movement against the oppression of African Americans? What does this mean going forward? Creating a synthesis of Mass Incarceration, the music of Kendrick Lamar, and The Black Lives Matter Movement, that overlaps and propels an intersection of culture and activism that inform one another. This all leads to the main takeaway of the thesis, that attempts to provide an interpretive understanding that pop culture, social media, and activism have created a different civil sphere, a Black public sphere that informs and educates through different avenues. All in all this thesis shows that music, social movements, and policy are all interconnected, and the music of Kendrick Lamar and the activism of The Black Lives Matter Movement provide a catalyst for change in the era of Mass Incarceration.

My thoughts before I started thinking...

I remember hearing about the murder of Michael Brown in Ferguson, Missouri. I remember this, not because of the news ticker at the bottom of a newscast. I remember this because I was working at Owens Food Court at Virginia Tech when I began hearing chants of “Hands up! Don’t Shoot!”, and thought it was pointless. Perhaps, it was where I was raised, or how my perceptions of life were morphed by an idealization of the American dream that I would later realize was a fallacy. Maybe it was because I just did not care. I felt guilty about the lack of remorse for his family and friends. I began looking into how I perceived race, what I thought about race, and how I felt about myself in contrast with issues of race. I started to do research on works on race and religion in America, and I came across the writings of Dr. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. I was taught about the Civil Rights Movement in high school, but race issues and race relations were never discussed afterwards, as if it was inconsequential.

Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.’s piece, “Letter from a Birmingham Jail”, resonated with me as a white Christian man, in the sense that I could make a statement on the grounds of morality and ethics but did not. I relate this to my church community and the avoidance of issues of race like hellfire itself with comments of ‘we have too much to worry about as it is’. I suppose coming from a poor area helps reinforce social stigmas like this. As I know of many white people who struggle to make ends meet. Consequently, I know many Black people that struggle to make ends meet. The thought I had in my head growing up, is that Black and white people struggle to make ends meet, and there is no real discernable difference between the two. I was naive to think that racism is not entrenched within our society. I was blind to African American suffering. I was young, and my perceptions were formed by the culture around me. I am not calling my family racist, or my community racist because I believe that is the wrong assumption

to make. However, I am saying that there is a lack of empathy because there is no understanding of the problems Black people face. I suppose that is why Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.'s letter resonated with me. I did not fully understand the problem, and to some extent I can never fully understand the problem, but the point I came to was that I should try.

In 2012, Kendrick Lamar released his album, "good kid m.A.A.d city", which challenged my perceptions of race and culture. I began actively listening to hip hop in 2014, when I first came across this album. Through his lyrics, I was beginning to develop new ideas about racism. Ideas that began to challenge, and change, my past views of race. The deaths of Trayvon Martin, Tamir Rice, Eric Garner, Michael Brown, and many others to police brutality and vigilante efforts, began to fuse with the lyrics I was hearing. I believe Kendrick Lamar's lyrics helped me understand why race matters. My family does not understand my project, but I do not blame them. I blame our society for not talking about issues of race. I blame what is occurring on a lack of communication and understanding of problems that need to be solved. I blame the poverty and inequality of African Americans that was never discussed and addressed. I blame a class system in America that creates separation. No-one wants to listen, to hear about something different than what they believe. People want to believe in a society that is flawless. This quote from Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. would shape my thesis, and help me understand what African American's went through. "Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere. We are caught in an inescapable network of mutuality, tied in a single garment of destiny" (King Jr., 1963). We should all work to help one another, and create a beautiful garment of equality together.

-Patrick Salmons

Table of Contents

Introduction	1
Methodology	3
Chapter 1: Where do we go from here?	8
Introduction	8
Colorblind? What about the 4 th Amendment? What about MY rights?	14
Life is hard for those who have no power.....	18
A Hope for the Future	22
Chapter 2: Kendrick Lamar: Hip hop Spirituality and the Voice of a Movement.....	28
Introduction	28
The hip hop wars and a muffled voice	29
are WE gon' be ALRIGHT	33
Mortal Man	41
Chapter 3: Black Lives Matter: Class Consciousness in a “Post-Racial” Society.....	44
Introduction	44
Black Lives Matter, Kendrick has a Dream	45
Police...HANDS UP!.....	48
What about Change?	51
Is there a Conclusion?	57
References:	61

Introduction

The United States is a diverse nation with many different viewpoints, and cultural norms. Moreover, acceptance and toleration in a society permeated with varying cultures and viewpoints is needed. There is a longing for camaraderie and acceptance across racial barriers throughout the history of the U.S. The era of Mass Incarceration has accelerated the problems of racial antagonism and inequality. Therefore, the main problem that this thesis will address is how the music and commentary of Kendrick Lamar provides a voice to those involved in the perilous system of Mass Incarceration. As well as the connections between Kendrick Lamar's music and The Black Lives Matter Movement, in an attempt to provide a solution to end era of Mass Incarceration. Mass Incarceration has specifically tailored laws that criminalize and incarcerate African Americans at an astonishing rate. I anticipate that this thesis will highlight faults in the U.S. justice system, such as; the militarization of the police, and specific effects of the criminalization of African Americans. The era of Mass Incarceration has crippled communities both economically and politically. Artistically, Kendrick Lamar's lyrics highlight the problems with the era of Mass Incarceration, and the effects of police brutality. This thesis serves as a connective tissue to many issues thinkers like Charles W. Mills, Michele Foucault, and others were concerned about in society, which is power.

This thesis links the policy associated with the era of Mass Incarceration, with the lyrics of Kendrick Lamar and The Black Lives Matter Movement, in an attempt to reveal different types of political enlightenment and activism not yet fully explored in the field of political science. Ultimately, this thesis is attempting to analyze the impact and social stigma that the lyrics of Kendrick Lamar provide for the African American community, and how The Black

Lives Matter Movement synthesizes these lyrics for a movement towards equality, towards an end to Mass Incarceration. This thesis is, therefore, very much in line with the writings of Karl Marx, C. Wright Mills, and Foucault, because it is examining what is occurring not only culturally, but also the political impact hip hop can have, and pop culture in general is continuing to have in this country. An aspect that is ill-researched or misunderstood in political science, which is what this thesis is attempting to present.

The first chapter of the thesis will present various authors and their arguments that will outline the era of Mass Incarceration. Which further illuminates the historical effect of African American oppression, and the connection between the lyrics of Kendrick Lamar and The Black Lives Matter Movement. Framing the research question, as an understanding of race through Kendrick Lamar and hip hop, social movements, and the justification of such in the era of Mass Incarceration.

The second chapter will further examine Kendrick Lamar's albums, *good kid m.A.A.d city*, and *To Pimp a Butterfly*. This chapter will catalog how they connect with scholars of race, as well as hip hop's current position in the U.S. Providing a basis for how Kendrick Lamar's lyrics are a catalyst for conversations about the problems the Black community faces. Using the works of Naomi Zack, Charles Mills, Reiland Rabaka, and Tricia Rose, the second chapter will elaborate on the musical expression of hip hop which presents stories of African American life. Kendrick Lamar's lyrics address the problems of a society that victimized African Americans as criminal through racially constructed laws in the era of Mass Incarceration. This chapter will attempt to analyze and critique the lyrics of Kendrick Lamar in an attempt to portray a sense of powerlessness in the African American community. Strengthening the connection between the lyrics of Kendrick Lamar and the activism of The Black Lives Matter Movement.

Chapter three analyzes the Black Lives Matter movement and its history. In this chapter, I will argue that The Black Lives Matter Movement is the current social movement specifically tailored to end police brutality. This chapter will present the argument for The Black Lives Matter Movement as a catalyst for future social movements that could bring about a more grand Black liberation movement. Keeanga-Yamahtta Taylor's work, *From #BLACKLIVESMATTER to Black Liberation* (Taylor, 2016), will provide the theoretical reasoning behind this claim. Her reasoning will be connected to the lyrics of Kendrick Lamar and how they help give a voice to the movement.

The conclusion will place the main point of each chapter in conversation with one another. The work of Kendrick Lamar, Michelle Alexander, and The Black Lives Matter Movement is the main focus of this thesis, and is imperative in the construction of a better country and world. Through an understanding of these problems faced by African Americans and Mass Incarceration, a movement has been created. A movement that understands the problems of Black people. A movement that was created because of the murders of Trayvon Martin, Michael Brown, Eric Garner and many more. A movement that has connected the whole Black community to continue to fight for their rights and equality, a fight to be "alright". The conclusion will show how the movement affected me and my writing of this thesis, and how it can continue to have an effect on the world. How social media and pop culture will continue to permeate and change our society is imperative in understanding what must continue to be done in the future.

Methodology

When examining and analyzing much of the literature surrounding Mass Incarceration, I began to look into how I can explain social movements differently than most scholars. My *prima facie*

research question was, if understanding of race has shaped policy, how are social movements justified in the scope of the current legal system? This question was far too broad and it needed to look at a specific policy, which warranted which policy? What social movement? What data am I going to use when analyzing the policy and social movements? My research was based on an interpretive case study, which helps understand what is currently happening in the U.S. intricately. I believe an interpretive case study is best suited for the questions I am asking, as opposed to a descriptive case study. This is because I am going to be interpreting data with the literature of scholars, and draw my conclusions from it. After an understanding of how my research would be conducted, I needed to narrow my focus on what I wanted to examine in great detail on what I would focus on, a single unitary focus. After reading various related literature on African American oppression I narrowed my focus down to the policy or era of Mass Incarceration and the literature that is informative about this era and policy. However, Mass Incarceration has been deeply analyzed and written about by numerous scholars. I had to brainstorm new ways of thinking about how to address Mass Incarceration and its effects on society. Using the interpretive case study as a design frame helped me narrow my focus to the effects of Mass Incarceration and The Black Lives Matter Movement. The Black Lives Matter Movement is the obvious choice because it is the largest and most discussed social movement that focuses primarily on the wrongs toward and the murder of many African Americans by police. This is the situation that Mass Incarceration has created, and my question aims at better understanding racial attitudes that are shaped by the policy of Mass Incarceration. But I had to have data to analyze what is occurring and why it is occurring in such a way. I needed an approach that was applicable to both Mass Incarceration and The Black Lives Matter Movement. What I came across was hip hop, and much of the literature on hip hop was that hip hop creates a

bridge between African Americans and legal policy (Rabaka, 2013). Pop culture in essence is a way for people to connect with other people in ways that scholars cannot. Again I continued to narrow my focus on how Mass Incarceration affects African American's and communities, how hip hop creates a new understanding and a voice for the communities affected, and ultimately, how The Black Lives Matter Movement is a catalyst for change through understanding not just the literature and social effects of Mass Incarceration, but also the informative stories told through hip hop (Chang, 2016). Hip hop is a diverse genre of music, with various artists and different approaches to beat and lyrics. I began to ask what kind of hip hop should I explore? I needed to analyze modern hip hop that informs the problems of Mass Incarceration and The Black Lives Matter Movement, while also being widely regarded as a social commentary. Numerous artists were available for this case study, but the work of Kendrick Lamar seemed to fit the criteria better than most hip hop artists. Kendrick Lamar's lyrics explicitly address the problems of gang culture, poverty, police brutality, education, and many of the issues that are associated with African American communities in the era of Mass Incarceration. Thus, deeming the interpretive case study more necessary for this particular research interest. When analyzing Kendrick Lamar's music, I needed specific ties to the policy of Mass Incarceration, I needed connective lyrics that served as a musical catalyst for The Black Lives Matter Movement, and I needed to be able to use the lyrics as the primary data for an interpretive approach to Mass Incarceration. Kendrick Lamar became my case study for examining Mass Incarceration and The Black Lives Matter Movement. When analyzing Kendrick Lamar's music, I was searching for lyrics that described the situation of African Americans in the era of Mass Incarceration. I was looking for specific examples that are in line with scholarly work on the subject. Many of his songs from the albums, *good kid m.A.A.d city* (Lamar, 2012), and, *To Pimp A Butterfly* (Lamar,

2015), provide a narrative of the problems associated with Mass Incarceration. His songs, “The Blacker the Berry” (Lamar, 2015k), and, “Good Kid” (Lamar, 2012c), are some of the examples that illustrate similar themes of oppression by Mass Incarceration that much of the literature on Mass Incarceration discusses. Thus, Kendrick Lamar’s lyrics provide a warranted interpretive case study for how his lyrics illustrate the problems of Mass Incarceration, and ultimately provide a connector to African American youth that scholars cannot necessarily reach. His lyrics provide a bridge for the gap between scholars and activism, while also keeping in mind that he himself is an artist not a philosopher. His lyrics are a rich source of data because I can use them to interpret how they provide reason for activism, how they link to other scholars work in describing hip hop to the public, and why music like this matters. I chose to fixate my analysis on not how many records he sold as an indicator for why he is important, but why Kendrick Lamar’s music is theoretically stimulating when discussing social activism. I want to ask what impact do his lyrics have? After going through this process of choosing a specific policy, and a specific set of data to analyze, I began to shape what effect this has on The Black Lives Matter Movement, and the impact of the movement on African American communities. What my interpretive case study was examining was the intersection between Kendrick Lamar’s lyrics and hip hop, The Black Lives Matter Movement, and Mass Incarceration. Using the lyrics of Kendrick Lamar in his two albums I analyzed how they interact with the literature of scholars that focus on race and social movements. Ultimately, my claims are that the lyrics of Kendrick Lamar inform the African American population of the problems with Mass Incarceration by rapping about his life and the similar battles he had to go through. The Black Lives Matter Movement is a movement that uses these lyrics as a catalyst for change, as they use his songs, such as “Alright”, to send a message of unity in the era of Mass Incarceration. My research

question thus becomes a mixture of how Mass Incarceration has impacted and oppressed the African American community using an interpretive case study of Kendrick Lamar's lyrics in relation to the impacts they have in the African American community and The Black Lives Matter Movement, and how they all are intersecting, presenting a new understanding of what social movements are in the U.S.

Chapter 1: Where do we go from here?

Introduction

This chapter will examine what Mass Incarceration is and how African Americans have been oppressed throughout history by examining the literature on the topic. Also, it will examine the art of Kendrick Lamar, and how his music interconnects with Mass Incarceration and The Black Lives Matter Movement, creating a framework for the rest of the thesis to follow. Ultimately, this chapter will examine Mass Incarceration and the intersection between Kendrick Lamar's music and The Black Lives Matter movement, which opens the argument for continued activism in the U.S.

Michael Parenti's work, *Democracy for the Few*, is a great place to begin a discussion of racial anxieties in this country. Parenti highlights the inequality of the U.S. government (Parenti, 2008). Parenti examines the failure of a political agenda to account for variation of race and class. He incorporates how policy, in many cases, benefits a fraction of the population, while the rest must endure the exclusivity created by racial policy (Parenti, 2008). In the tenth chapter of his book, Parenti constructs an argument that shows how minorities, especially African Americans, were discriminated against by the legal system and racial policies that do not protect their rights. "Almost six times as many Whites use narcotics as African Americans, yet 62 percent of drug offenders sent to state prisons nationwide are African American..." (Parenti, 2008, p. 133). Parenti elaborates on racial profiling and how white people are usually set free on convictions of murder, because judges are hesitant to convict white Americans (Parenti, 2008, p. 133). Parenti's work provides an understanding of how racial profiling, socioeconomic inequality, and a legal system fail to protect the rights of minorities. Parenti acknowledges that

there are some instances where the law is successful at protecting rights of minorities. However, if they are not rich, and they are not White, these instances are rare (Parenti, 2008, p. 134).

While Parenti gives an overview of problematic legal systems, he at times is only giving an overview. Parenti establishes a base for societal problems by also addressing constitutional problems. He does not specifically present race as the motivation for his work, rather class. Thus, the essential take away from Parenti's work is the understanding of class relations, and the connection of race and class are connected in this ongoing struggle. Ultimately, Parenti's work highlights a necessity for activism such as The Black Lives Matter Movement (Cullors, et al., 2012). His work is a building block in developing an image of suffering in the African American community during the era of Mass Incarceration.

While Parenti presents a basis for current events, there needs to be a discussion of the historical oppression of African Americans in the U.S. A point that James Baldwin reminds readers of in his work, *The Fire Next Time* (Baldwin, 1963). Baldwin views the "world as white and we are black. White people hold the power, which means that they are superior to blacks...the world has ways of making this difference known and felt and feared"(Baldwin, 1963, p. 39-40). How did our society become a white world, as opposed to a black one, or a diverse one, or rather an equal one? Among numerous works that help further untangle how current American society was constructed, perhaps the best starting point would be, *Slavery By Another Name*, by Douglas Blackmon (Blackmon, 2008). Blackmon analyzes the terrors of slavery and its after effects by analyzing past prison records and sentences of African Americans in the years after the abolition of slavery.

Blackmon's historical critique of what occurred during slavery and immediately following, provides an understanding of the current era of Mass Incarceration. What is intriguing

about Blackmon's claim is that slavery did not end after the Civil War, rather it continued in a similar manner. The lack of political theory Blackmon presents can lead to problems in deciphering where his research has theoretically lead in terms of modern political society. But the historical argument of how slavery, in different conceptions, continued to permeate the legal systems is eerily similar to the prison sentences mentioned in Michelle Alexander's work, *The New Jim Crow* (Alexander, 2012). In Alexander's work mandatory sentences were natural sentences, and once in the prison system it becomes difficult to escape legally. "Mandatory drug sentencing laws strip judges of their traditional role of considering all relevant circumstances in an effort to do justice in the individual case" (Alexander, 2012, p. 90). Kids with no criminal record, would be sent to jail with a harsh sentence that would never end for them. Kendrick Lamar addresses this issue in his song "i", he converses about the ability of a judge to mandate sentences to Black people (Lamar, 2015e). These same sentences occurred in the late 1800's and early 1900's, which set a precedent that African Americans were criminals. "Four other states legislated that African Americans could not legally be hired for work without a discharge paper from their previous employer-effectively preventing them from leaving the plantation of the white man they worked for" (Blackmon, 2008, p. 54). An analysis of Blackmon's work reveals that these prisoners would replace slave labor in a legal manner. Whereas Alexander's work argues similar patterns, but it was because of the lack of work during the election of Ronald Reagan, which allowed for the 'War on Drugs' to eviscerate African American communities (Alexander, 2012). These works in conversation with one another create an understanding conceptions of historical constructs that place African Americans at the bottom of society. The creation of the era of Mass Incarceration, goes back to slavery, and can be traced back to now. Blackmon underlines the problems of economic uncertainty, the lack of resources, and

government protection that ensure rights reserved for whites only in the era of ‘Neoslavery’ (Blackmon, 2008).

Alexander reconfigures the Blackmon’s argument for current times, by the ‘War on Drugs’ policy enacted during the Richard Nixon era, and furthered by Ronald Reagan, as a catalyst for the era of Mass Incarceration. Blackmon and Alexander both come to similar conclusions for African American criminality in the U.S. justice system, a pattern of history that repeats itself. Alexander analyzes this idea in her discussion of the Civil Rights Movement and police brutality by quoting then West Virginia senator as saying, “If blacks conduct themselves in an orderly way, they will not have to worry about police brutality” (Alexander, 2012, p. 42). What occurred in the years after the Civil Rights Movement was a continuation of police brutality, and a war against African American communities through violence and a ‘War on Drugs’. Described by Kendrick Lamar in his song , “Good Kid” (Lamar, 2012c), the theoretical disposition African Americans are faced with every day, not to mention the people who are supposed to be on your side, criminalize you even as a youth. Power was taken away from judges to make ‘judgement calls’ on kids who may have been in the wrong place at the wrong time. Sentences for minor, sometimes, first time drug offences, could end one’s life and dreams. “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...It’s mando. Right, it’s mando” (Lamar, 2015e).

The era of Mass Incarceration began in the 1970’s, and perhaps earlier, during the Nixon presidency campaign, when his administration declared a ‘War on Drugs’ (Alexander, 2012). What occurred later during the Reagan, Clinton, Bush administration all demonstrate times of civil unrest towards police. Hip hop was at arms with police brutality and the effects it had,

especially in the streets of the communities they knew and loved. This created a hip hop revolution, where artists began speaking their mind against police brutality and inequality. As noted by Clarence Lusane, “[D]ebates over police brutality were also forced into the public arena as a result of rap songs” (Lusane, 2004, p. 358). NWA was arguably the most pronounced hip hop artist in the 1980’s and their songs were specifically addressing social inequality and police violence within Black communities (Lusane, 2004). What occurred as a result of rap music was a resistance from many who stated rap music was culturally degrading to African Americans. A main concern of authors Reiland Rabaka, Michael Eric Dyson, and Marc Lamont Hill, who all argue hip hop has reasons beyond just music. Hip hop is a form of expression given to individuals who otherwise would not have a voice. Grassroots hip hop, as well as other forms of hip hop, are imperative to cultural movements such as The Black Lives Matter Movement, because they provide a soundtrack and a message. There is a commercialized presence of hip hop geared towards white audiences that depicts a fallacy of African American life. However, as Rabaka highlights in his work, *The Hip Hop Movement*:

A lot of rap music—especially what is variously called “conscious” rap, “political” rap, or “message” rap—critiques ongoing antiblack racism and questions the social, political, and economic gains of the Civil Rights Movement and Black Power Movement. In this sense, although often overlooked, rap also voices hip hoppers’ intraracial critiques of both Civil Rights Movement moderates and Black Power militants. Instead of the prosperity and remixed democracy they believed they were promised by Civil Rights moderates and Black Power militants many hip hoppers experienced firsthand new, virtually unprecedented forms of callousness and poverty as they came of age in the last quarter of the twentieth century (Rabaka, 2013, p. 308).

Kendrick Lamar’s music wrestles and addresses with the concepts of police brutality and money in hip hop throughout both of his albums. Kendrick Lamar’s music has resonated with many in this generation, because he is making music geared towards the problems of what he sees in his society. He does not take away from the message of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., James

Baldwin, Malcolm X, Rosa Parks, Fannie Lou Hamer, rather he is adds to the conversation with his story. According to a piece in the New York Times, Kendrick Lamar discusses his albums as a message to the poor youth in the ghetto, as a way out of the hell they are in, by attempting to purify a message of hope in hip hop (Coscarelli, 2015). “Until hip-hop is recognized as a broad cultural movement, rather than simply an influential moneymaker, those who seek to tap into hip-hop’s potential to impact social change should not expect substantive progress” (Kitwana, 2004, p. 345). Until hip-hop at the grassroots level is allowed to change the dialogue of commercialized hip-hop, progress may become stagnant (Rabaka, 2013). Thus, when the prison population rose astronomically due to the ‘War on Drugs’, a voice emerged through music, hip hop. Hip hop gives a voice to poor ghetto youths in America during this time, the same way that rhythm & blues and rock & roll gave a voice to poor during the Civil Rights Movement. Music provided a reason for Black liberation in a time of turmoil during the Civil Rights Movement, and it is doing the same now (Rabaka, 2013, p. 309).

The Hip Hop Movement’s politics should not be expected to mindlessly mirror the Civil Rights Movement or the Black Power Movement’s politics. At first issue is the simple fact that such a position is nostalgic in the worst way, yearning for an era that currently only exists in history books. The Hip Hop Movement must be allowed to emerge in its own time and on its own terms...the impulse on the part of nostalgic African American elders and black bourgeois conservatives to control and quarantine African American youth militancy is not new and, in truth...has been a repetitive part of African American history, culture, and struggle reaching all the way back to the Black Women’s Club Movement and the New Negro movement. In fact, what is strikingly new and novel about the Hip Hop Movement when compared with the Civil Rights Movement and the Black Power Movement is that it registers as both an African American movement and an unprecedented multicultural, multiracial, multinational, multilingual, and multireligious multi-issue movement (Rabaka, 2013, pp. 309-310)

Hip hop is a powerful weapon against oppression, and just as other music movements in African American history, hip hop too faces problems with voice. However, this voice must be developed on its own, just as other music has developed its own voice. Relating this back to the

era of Mass Incarceration, hip hop is providing hope and rhythm to those affected by this injustice. The lyrics of Kendrick Lamar epitomizes social and political stigmas of police violence and unjust punishment, he is in many ways a preacher to poor Blacks (Coscarelli, 2015). This unjust punishment criminalizes African American communities, and many are placed in prison for minor offences that could cost them their life. Alexander elaborates that the ‘War on Drugs’ was not a way to crackdown on drugs and violent crime in urban areas, rather it was a way to suppress the progress of the Civil Rights movement (Alexander, 2012). With the total number of incarcerated people in the U.S. over two million, many of which are minorities, Alexander urges a movement to reveal these injustices (Alexander, 2012). Hip hop is becoming the soundtrack for this revolution, an escape from inequality through music.

Colorblind? What about the 4th Amendment? What about MY rights?

The overarching theme of Alexander’s work is the notion of colorblindness, which is a morphed flawed American ideal. “[M]ass incarceration is predicated on the notion that an extraordinary number of African Americans have freely chosen a life of crime and thus belong behind bars” (Alexander, 2012, p. 248). This quote from Alexander, presents that we have a ‘colorblind’ society that presents African American’s as criminals that deserve to be locked up.

Colorblindness creates a society that disregards central humanity, but rather views people how those with people choose to view them. The work of Naomi Zack and Charles Mills illuminate concerns for people of color being excluded and criminalized based solely on the color of their skin. Theoretically this is not a function of a ‘free society’, but U.S. society is plagued with a long history of slavery, Jim Crow Laws, and now Mass Incarceration. (Blackmon, 2008) (Zack, 2015) (Mills, 1997). The implementation of drug policy has normalized African American racial

inequality as criminality. Which, historically has been the case, and has established a need for social protest for human rights. Alexander gives an account similar to Joe Feagin (Feagin, et al., 2001), by elaborating on the conceptions of legal policy as being racially motivated. Alexander structures her argument as a call for social advocacy that is evident and necessary for change in what Alexander calls a 'new caste system':

If Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. is right that the arc of history is long, but it bends toward justice, a new movement will arise; and if civil rights organizations fail to keep up with the times, they will be pushed to the side as another generation of advocates comes to the fore. Hopefully the new generation will be led by those who know best the brutality of the new caste system—a group with greater vision, courage, and determination than the old guard can muster, trapped as they may be in an outdated paradigm (Alexander, 2012, p. 260).

Alexander presents a hope for the future, as this caste system can be dismantled by social activism. Alexander presents a case for continued activism in the U.S., a struggle that must occur for freedom.

Alexander's analysis of the corruption of legal policy is a strong basis for the continual development of how the era of Mass Incarceration criminalizes African Americans, but also how these policies continue to benefit a White European society. The Black Lives Matter Movement is speaking out against these atrocities, but at the same time they are being demonized by the media for misleading agendas (Warren, 2016). Roland Warren attacks the movement for leaving out Black men, yet their website states "...all Black lives along the gender spectrum. It centers those that have been marginalized within Black liberation movements. It is a tactic to (re)build the Black liberation movement" (Cullors, et al., 2012). Therefore Warren's claims of inclusion are based on a false premise, as The Black Lives Matter Movement focus is on justice for all Black lives. The movement does not marginalize Black men, rather the movement seeks to further empower Black people towards a more cohesive Black Liberation movement.

Alexander punctuates the difficulties of African Americans as Americans, as she addresses the problematic colorblindness that has been entrenched within American legal rhetoric. Of which, perhaps the most problematic for African Americans was the enactment of the Military Cooperation with Law Enforcement Act in 1981, “which encouraged the military to give local, state, and federal police access to military bases, intelligence, research, weaponry, and other equipment for drug interdiction” (Alexander, 2012, p. 77). This led to home raids by SWAT teams looking for any evidence of drugs in an area. Only thirty five percent of the time drugs were found on the premises, where doors were kicked in, windows were smashed, and military grade weapons were ready to fire (Cooper, 2015, p. 1191). Hannah Cooper’s article, “War on Drugs: Policing and Police Brutality”, establishes that police violence is a result of the War on Drugs. The Posse Comitatus Act of 1878 “made it a felony for the Armed Forces to perform the law enforcement duties of the civilian police”, but since the ‘War on Drugs’, much of the Posse Comitatus Act has been dismantled to further police militarization (Cooper, 2015, p. 1190). Police forces, since the War on Drugs began, have turned into small military forces that target African American and Latino families, through stop and frisk situations and raids. (Cooper, 2015) (Williams, 2015). This creates a fear or distrust of police in these impoverished communities. Police tend to zone areas where they believe crime is most concentrated, many of which are African American communities, where they are handcuffed for hours for a crime they did not commit (Cooper, 2015). At any time, any citizen who is perceived to be a criminal by the police will be stopped for no other reason than their skin color and appearance. Not to mention, the people targeted have very little power to renounce their criminality (Cooper, 2015, p. 1191). This problem is similar to those faced during the Civil Rights Movement, the problem of assumed criminality. The Civil Rights Movement provided a voice to those who were being

harassed and oppressed by the police. The Black Lives Matter Movement continues this voice in a society of lingering police violence. Which Alexander elaborates:

Even when released from the system's formal control, the stigma of criminality lingers. Police supervision, monitoring, and harassment are facts of life not only for all those labeled criminals, but for all those who "look like" criminals. Lynch mobs may be long gone, but the threat of police violence is ever present. A wrong move or sudden gesture could mean massive retaliation by the police. A wallet could be mistaken for a gun. The "whites only" signs may be gone, but new signs have gone up- notices placed in job applications, rental agreements, loan applications, forms for welfare benefits, school applications, and petitions for licenses, informing the general public that "felons" are not wanted here. A criminal record today authorizes precisely the forms of discrimination we supposedly left behind- discrimination in employment, housing, education, public benefits, and jury service. Those labeled criminals can even be denied the right to vote (Alexander, 2012, p. 141).

A free prisoner is never really free, and they are a perennial unwanted piece of baggage going through a never-ending check at an airport. He or she is no freer than a free slave. In an era where the police and judicial system have created an idea of colorblindness which permeates our society to this day, there is little hope for a 'criminal' who is African American in this country. Colorblindness is a problem because it denies the history of America, it denies the problems of African Americans, and of Hispanics. It benefits those who are white because they do not need to worry about race or class, because according to colorblindness, race and class do not exist.

Alexander elaborates:

Criminals, it turns out, are the one social group in America we have permission to hate. In "colorblind" America, criminals are the new whipping boys. They are entitled to no respect and little moral concern. Like the "coloreds" in the years following emancipation, criminals today are deemed a characterless and purposeless people, deserving of our collective scorn and contempt. When we say someone was "treated like a criminal," what we mean to say is that he or she was treated as less than human, like a shameful creature (Alexander, 2012, p. 141).

Alexander's argument of police brutality and effective strategies of racial confinement through the 'War on Drugs' bolsters the overall argument of African American victimization by the

government. Her argument, when put in conversation with Kendrick Lamar and The Black Lives Matter Movement, defines the problem of colorblindness and provides a basis for a Black liberation movement. Her work exemplifies a need for a new form of governance, a new era of humanity that can rid itself of the chains. As Kendrick Lamar raps in his song, “Institutionalized”, “ If I was the president/ I’d pay my mama’s rent/ Free my homies and then/ Bulletproof my Chevy doors/ Lay in the White House and get high, Lord/ Who ever thought?/ Master take the chains off me” (Lamar, 2015f). People need to be able to live how they please, without being deemed a criminal in a ‘free society’. Kendrick Lamar’s music carries this message, and delivers it to the masses.

Life is hard for those who have no power

There is a perception of criminality associated with African Americans in the U.S., which Kendrick Lamar has embraced in his music and flipped it on its head. *Good kid m.A.A.d city* (Lamar, 2012) explores the ideas of criminality as a response to being victimized as a criminal in a rough neighborhood that made him and many others “a human sacrifice” (Lamar, 2012c). Kids are given a choice in neighborhoods like Kendrick Lamar’s of being a gang member or being criminalized for minor crimes by the police department. In a sense the laws against drugs in the era of Mass Incarceration dismantled African American communities, because they created mandatory sentences that ended lives. Judicial appointments during the Richard Nixon presidency invoked racial precedents against Black communities that disproportionately harm African American communities as opposed to white communities (Provine, 2007, p. 13). An important takeaway of the systemic continual deterioration of the African American community is the resistance provided by hip hop music. Especially Kendrick Lamar, who wrote the song, “i”,

to inform African Americans that no matter what happens they should love themselves (Lamar, 2015e). The continuation of historical oppression is a gruesome story told through the laws that contribute to the era of Mass Incarceration, as well as the historical roots in slavery and Jim Crow laws, or as Blackmon states it, ‘Age of Neoslavery’ (Blackmon 2008, p. 402). The history of African Americans in the United States starts when slavery ended, because before that they were not Americans, rather some inconsistency in U.S. society. A black mark Alexis de Tocqueville did not condemn, but nonetheless curiously asked about when he visited America (Tocqueville, 1984).

In 1914, Drug Prohibition began to develop with the Harrison Narcotics Act, which relied on statistics that presented “1.3 percent of our population was addicted to narcotic drugs...” (Gray, 2012, p. 19). Fast-forward several decades and a ripple effect has occurred that has scarred our understanding of criminality in America. An argument that is backed up with endless poverty in urban and suburban areas, along with many still addicted to the drugs that were deemed as the ‘enemies’. President Lyndon B. Johnson helped passed the torch of oppression with his administration’s ‘War on Crime’. Ironically it was put in place during a time of social unrest and passage of the Civil Rights Act in 1964. The Safe Streets Act of 1968 developed the understanding of police surveillance in Black communities. The Law Enforcement Assistance Act was enacted as an expansion of power for the Safe Streets Act (Hinton, 2016, p. 2). The Law Enforcement Assistance Act was enacted to deal with resistance during political unrest in urban areas through police force (Hinton, 2016, p. 2). The passage of the Safe Streets act in 1968 created a police force, “which invested \$400 million worth of “seed money” in the War on Crime” (Hinton, p. 2). When the Law Enforcement Assistance Act was abandoned in 1981, it had cost ten billion dollars.

Republican and Democratic policymakers alike instead mobilized to fight the War on Crime and, later, President Ronald Reagan's more aggressive "War on Drugs." This long War on Crime would eventually produce the contemporary atrocity of mass incarceration in America, distinguished by a rate of imprisonment far above all other industrialized nations and involving the systemic confinement of entire groups of citizens. (Hinton, 2016, p. 2)

Flash forward to now, with the protests in Ferguson, and the outrage against police brutality and police militarization. Police that suppressed the protests in Ferguson with tear gas, assault rifles, tanks and so on (Do Not Resist, 2016). The Law Enforcement Assistance Act may not be directly responsible for what occurred in Ferguson, Missouri, or the violence that occurs at routine traffic stops. However, by 1981, the damage had been done. "The mission that the White House and Congress effectively assigned to the Law Enforcement Assistance Act was to expand supervision and control in low-income urban communities" (Hinton, 2016, p. 3). This created a consensus that African Americans were criminals, "policy-makers interpreted black urban poverty as pathological-as the product of individual and cultural 'deficiencies'" (Hinton, 2016, p. 3, p. 19). This set the stage for future policies with racist discourse at the core, to target poorer areas of the country unfairly and unconstitutionally. The 'War on Drugs,' championed by Ronald Reagan, led to the current status of 2.2 million citizens in jail, where Black and Latino Americans make up 59 percent of the nation's prison population, even though they are only a quarter of the population (Hinton, 2016, p. 5).

The era of Mass Incarceration is an era of suffering, and abysmal conditions for Blacks, Latinos, and poor whites. Our drug policies have failed to stop the distribution drugs, rather they have contributed to a systemic racist system that the Civil Rights movement could not stop. This is because after the death of many of the leaders of the movement, African American's were left without a movement, and were unceremoniously rounded up like the criminals the government perceived them to be. Today, in the face of a system that has drowned out the voices of dissent,

new laws such as President Bill Clinton's Violent Crime Control and Law Enforcement Act, that established harsh sentences for first time drug offenders. Clinton later admitted it was problematic for Black communities because it put many African Americans behind bars for life for minor offenses (Levitz, 2015). However, Clinton also defended his bill against The Black Lives Matter Movement protestors the next year, calling the drug dealers "bad citizens." In turn, rebuking his last statement, and reverberating the last hundred years of African Americans as criminals (Muhammad, 2011) (Sanders, 2016). Kendrick Lamar, and hip-hop, presents hope for a society that has looked over the needs of those who need it desperately. Lamar carries on the hope of Civil Rights Leaders in a similar vein, through resistance, through community, through religion and hope for a better day:

Hip hop will be the soundtrack for youth as they use their bodies, skin tone, and physiognomy to commit to the publicness of protest, but if these good kids in mad cities do not love themselves and balance what is public and intimate, they will be constantly, restlessly, resisting forever (Love, 2016, p. 323).

Good kids have been trapped in mad cities since the end of slavery. While other hip hop artists have brought attention to these injustices of our society, Kendrick Lamar's music is about now. Kendrick Lamar is often dark in his depictions of life for African Americans, but it is also hopeful that people will hear his music and react accordingly to the problems so many grow up with (Love, 2016). In Kendrick Lamar's track, "Sing About Me, I'm Dying of Thirst", he incorporates his discontent with the street life, and the everyday grind of him against his peers as a way to understand religion, and understand his place in a society that does not accept him (Lamar, 2012f). He is attempting to connect with people who feel the same way, his lyrics imply he does not want to forget his community, but he wants to remember his friends, his family. He creates a connection through his music to the audience through a religious connotation that does

not degrade the African American community, but pleads that the audience understands African American communities (Lamar, 2012f). Kendrick Lamar's music is a soundtrack for The Black Lives Matter Movement because he raps about the hardships, he revels in the proposition of resistance towards those who have taken his innocence away (Spanos & Grant, 2016). He speaks up for a community that Alexander, Rabaka, Hill, and others all try to. His music provides a voice that academics cannot, it provides a relatable presence, a relation to the problems African Americans face, and he raps about it to the world (Coscarelli, 2015).

Thus, The Black Lives Matter Movement is more than a resistance movement, it is a liberation movement for the future of Black America. It is a movement of hope in a country that has attempted to extinguish it with images of Black criminality and police violence. Kendrick Lamar's music and the activism of The Black Lives Matter Movement are building a hopeful future. The Black Lives Matter Movement is a movement with the weight of history against it, but perhaps what will occur is something special, a hope for a better future through active resistance. "Significantly, blacks never had a contract with America; they agreed to no covenant with hell. In the absence of power, people hope" (Hayes, 2012, p. 306). With The Black Lives Matter Movement and a soundtrack to counter oppression, there could be an end to the policies of powerlessness and despair. A hope for the future.

A Hope for the Future

An anthology of African American literature, "From the Plantation to the Prison", argues that legal institutions have haunted African Americans, creating a disdain for political institutions that deem them as others and outside political representation. The first page delivers the heaviest blow, as it examines Black men as powerless in a world ruled and made for the ideals of White

Europeans (Green, 2008, p. 1). The anthology is developed around the fundamental belief of personhood, and sanity. However, the argument is formulated by the acknowledgement that personhood and sanity of African Americans cannot exist with legal weight that does not allow such individualism to thrive. The ideological conception of confinement is a recurring trope of the mental denial of oneself. While this work primarily examines African American literature as its source material, the book presents the development of ideals of persecution and oppression of natural rights that are demonstrated in society as a norm. A norm that Alexander states:

Since the days of slavery, black men have been depicted and understood as criminals, and their criminal “nature” has been depicted and understood as criminals, and their criminal “nature” has been among the justifications for every caste system to date. The criminalization and demonization of black men is one habit America seems unlikely to break without addressing head-on the racial dynamics that have given rise to successive caste systems (Alexander, 2012, p. 240).

Moreover, the argument that is conceptualized throughout the anthology, is simply the story of a man who wants to provide and be the ideal character for his family. Due to societal structures deeming him as a criminal rather than a citizen, he cannot provide and becomes distraught because of his inability to gain in a society that has policed his entire existence as criminal and unworthy (Green, 2008). Due to what Alexander explains as a “demonization”, he cannot find work, he cannot find a purpose for his life. With the lack of incentive and the constant rebuttals of self-worth placed on African American’s there is little logical reason to follow a set path that only leads to further oppression. What can one do if they are victimized, forced to admit to a crime they did not commit? Do they submit to a hierarchy of racial structures that presents them as such? If not then what?

There is a target on the Black community, a target placed by the criminal justice system through rigorous court cases and unconstitutional laws that continue the trend of keeping young Black people in their place. This message is a rallying cry for The Black Lives Matter

Movement. The Black Lives Matter Movement has turned into a movement tailored for the suffering of African Americans, and they provide hope for a better tomorrow. Alexander states, “When the War on Drugs gained full steam in the mid-1980s, prison admissions for African Americans skyrocketed, nearly quadrupling in three years... Although the majority of illegal drug users and dealers nationwide are white, three-fourths of all people imprisoned for drug offenses have been black or Latino” (Alexander, 2012, p. 98). The era of Mass Incarceration, and the laws enacted under it via the Zero Tolerance policy, have deliberately targeted African Americans, just like the “Black codes”, and Jim Crow before it. The Black Lives Matter Movement is a movement for justice for those affected by the era of Mass Incarceration.

The racial laws and assertions during the era of Mass Incarceration of the United States is embodied in African American literature as a stranglehold on their individual humanity. What one should do when the cards are never in your favor, is a difficult task to find oneself. Taylor would suggest to protest, to go out of one’s way to fight an ongoing battle of the culmination of race and class that has been blurred in the United States (Taylor, 2016). Kendrick Lamar’s music encourages continued speech, continued conversations about the world. His lyrics begin a conversation that cannot be silenced by police militarization or jail time, “Alls my life I has to fight” (Lamar, 2015a). Through resistance and continued understanding of one another, the Black Lives Matter movement gives hope where none is located. The lyrics of Kendrick Lamar provide a resistance toward police militarization and provide a soundtrack of resistance, a soundtrack of acknowledgement of the African American community. Hip hop is helpful in giving insights on how African Americans perceive government. Consequently, real recognizes real.

Charles Mills', *The Racial Contract*, argues along these lines of hope when he presents that African Americans and other minorities were left out of the development of society through a "racial contract" rather than a "social contract", because of a perceived inferiority to European whites (Mills, 1997). Mills argues that philosophically African Americans, as well as other minorities, have been strategically left out of all policy making decision in a White supremacist state. Mills develops the fundamental theorization of how race and policy are connected through a system of oppression that hinders African American, while putting whites on a pedestal (Mills, 1997). "Racism as an ideology needs to be understood as aiming at the minds of non-whites as well as whites, inculcating subjugation...the Racial Contract prescribes nonwhite self-loathing and racial deference to white citizens"(Mills, 1997, p. 89). Moreover, Mills gives the foundation for how legal policy in the United States during the era of "Neo Slavery" and Mass Incarceration has influenced perceptions of race. His work necessitates a social response, not only from African Americans, but from those who benefit from such a system. Without the backing of some of those in power, action will mean nothing because power is not available to minorities, it is only available to the white elites. If the Racial Contract we are under is not torn apart, it will continue to be rewritten "and justice will be restricted to "just us"" (Mills, 1997, p. 133). Perhaps more questions are presented in Mills' description of societal boundaries than answers. Asking these questions about the foundation of western society, the demos of the U.S. can work to amend the griefs of racial inequality.

Framing individuals as indifferent and other, the laws today in the United States makes it impossible for African Americans to attain the wealth and resources whites have. Which, Kendrick Lamar incorporates this in his songs, eluding to the understanding that most black kids will never achieve anything in this society because of how they grow up. No matter how

intelligent he or she is the difficulties with growing up in ghettos, prove often times too much to overcome. The racial policies in the era of Mass Incarceration, were made to tie African Americans to crime and poverty. With class as the permanent glue that can only be taken care of with a solution. Hip hop is a part of the solution that is paired with current activism in the wake of the murders of Trayvon Martin, and Michael Brown. With every movement there is music, there is expression, and with this generation that expression is hip hop (Rabaka, 2013). White governmental organizations are not in the best interest of African Americans, because a white government cannot see the world the same way as an African American, and thus enacts laws that could be good for whites but lack empathy towards African Americans (Yancy, 2004). It is the dangerous racial philosophy of Europe that has shaped a negative construction of African Americans that led to slavery physically; and later economically and politically (Yancy, 2004). It is the continual construction of barriers against the hip hop community, and African American activism that puts the movement in a bad light. With the continual demonization of hip hop and lack of understanding of its cultural significance there is a struggle to get people to understand the impact hip-hop has (Rabaka, 2013).

Cornel West's work, *Race Matters*, argues that the power politics in America have continually created an unjust society with numerous racial problems. West examines why institutions are set out against African Americans, while also emphasizing social movements that helped create and continue to create change, and foster opinion. He also discusses the failure of elite racial institutions to provide a voice for African Americans (West, 1993). West provokes the subject of race relations, economic struggle, and housing impediments that have caused impediments for generations of African Americans. West argues for a "constructive rage" a movement that embodies the suffering of African Americans so that other non-African

Americans can understand the suffering. “Black people’s rage ought to target white supremacy, but also ought to realize...homophobia...just as the struggle against black poverty can be supported by progressive elements of any race, gender, or sexual orientation” (West, 1993, p. 105). West presents that a focus, such as that of Malcolm X, is a way for African Americans to channel their rage at a system of oppression by constructively analyzing and criticizing the laws and policies that oppress them. West gives a face to social movements, he wholeheartedly challenges the corruption of institution through productive criticism and understanding.

Along with West, the works of bell hooks, James Baldwin, Malcolm X, all factor into an understanding of resistance against the oppressors. An understanding Kendrick Lamar raps about emphatically, an understanding that The Black Lives Matter Movement enthusiastically supports and chants in the street, that they too will be “alright” (Lamar, 2015a). Hope may be trivial, but when combined with purpose and activism, along with a generation of voices, hope can be powerful in the era of Mass Incarceration. A hope that reverberates through the streets of Ferguson, the lyrics of Kendrick Lamar, Fruitvale Station, in the neighborhoods in Sanford, Florida. A hope that is now country-wide becomes the job of those with a voice to lead a new movement of hope.

Chapter 2: Kendrick Lamar: Hip hop Spirituality and the Voice of a Movement

Introduction

Hip hop has influenced many people around the world, for good or bad. In the case of Kendrick Lamar music helped get him out of the situations he faced every day in Compton, California. Kendrick Lamar was born in a rough place, ransacked by gang culture and drug addiction. He witnessed his first murder when he was five years old (Lamar, 2015g), something that he stated changed him and his perceptions of the world. Kendrick Lamar has bottled up his emotions and stories, and presents them in a way that illuminates police militarization, Mass Incarceration, and a Black man's place in this world that is a failed dream of his. Kendrick Lamar's albums, *To Pimp a Butterfly*, (Lamar, 2015) and *good kid m.A.A.d city* (Lamar, 2012), speak of the necessity for people to come together, and understand the difficulties African Americans face. The evidence of Mass Incarceration through the lens of Alexander, as well as the moral effects this has on the African American community through the lens of Mills, and Zack, will help analyze the lyrics of Kendrick Lamar as a soundtrack for a movement.

This chapter will break down Kendrick Lamar's lyrics through a theoretical lens, by using Zack's work on ethics and morality as well as Rose's *The Hip Hop Wars*. Kendrick Lamar's two albums provide a base for social activism. Kendrick Lamar raps about the problems he experienced growing up, he raps about the problems he sees in society against Black people. Kendrick Lamar, Rose, Rabaka, Hill, Alexander, Mills, and Zack in her work, *The Ethics and Mores of Race: Equality after the History of Philosophy*, provide answers to a specter of equality, which is championed by Kendrick Lamar's lyrics. As Zack states:

Slavery, segregation, and apartheid were all legal practices, enforced by governments. Racism, in both private and institutional forms, has been repeatedly left undisturbed by government, as well as practiced by it (Zack, 2011, p. 49).

Consequently, through an understanding of Kendrick Lamar's lyrics in these two albums will present a basis for philosophical resistance and change. If governments have legally been racist throughout history, perhaps the focus should shift to the individual identity of thinking, an individual rights focus (Zack, 2015). Therefore, this chapter will analyze Kendrick Lamar's lyrics as an encounter between prominent scholars of race, the effects of race relations and what this encounter means for justice through social movements moving forward.

The hip hop wars and a muffled voice

Rose's work, *The Hip Hop Wars*, presents a narrative that specifically attempts to understand what is happening with hip hop music, and why it is moving in certain directions. The main argument Rose makes throughout her work, is that hip hop is powerful in the trends it sets, but it also has been gutted of its influence (Rose, 2008). As Rose states:

Hip Hop is in a terrible crisis. Although its overall fortunes have risen sharply, the most commercially promoted and financially successful hip hop...has become a playground for caricatures of black gangstas, pimps and hoes...This scenario differs vastly from the wide range of core images, attitudes, and icons that defined hip hop during its earlier years of public visibility. In the 1980s, when rap's commercial value began to develop steam, gansta rappers were only part of a much larger iconic tapestry. There were many varieties of equally positioned styles of rap-gangsta as well as party, political, afrocentric, and avant-garde, each with multiple substyles as well. However, not only were many styles of rap driven out of the corporate-promoted mainstream, but since the middle to late 1990s, the social, artistic, and political significance of figures like the gangsta and street hustler substantially devolved into apolitical, simple-minded, almost comic stereotypes. Indeed, by the late 1990s, most of the affirming, creative stories and characters that had stood at the defining core of hip hop had been gutted. To use a hip hop metaphor, they were driven underground, buried, and left to be dug up only by the most deeply invested fans and artists (Rose, 2008, p. 2).

Hip hop become dumbed down by the commodification of rap, and many of the rappers who rap about problems are continually weeded out by the corporate scheme now present in hip hop (Rose, 2008, p. 3). “Multimillion -dollar corporations with near total control over the airwaves” decide what we as consumers hear, and the majority of rap and hip hop we hear is the misogynistic songs that have sold well to white audiences (Rose, 2008, pp. 84-85). Helping to cement the false pretense that African Americans are criminal with depictions of such (Rose, 2008, pp. 84-85). Kendrick Lamar demonstrates how commercialization has taken something from him, made him something he himself is not proud of as he alludes to a story throughout the album, *To Pimp a Butterfly* (Lamar, 2015). The story depicts Kendrick Lamar as he sits in a hotel room contemplating how he misused his influence in what he does (Lamar, 2015e). In the song, “Institutionalized”, Kendrick Lamar confronts the demons of the recording industry as he raps that all the shiny awards and industry politics mean nothing when all of his friends are being locked up (Lamar, 2015f). Kendrick Lamar is alluding to the industry being his form of imprisonment, where he is the harvest of the music industry. Wealth hurts a man and can change him, and it does not help those already in jail (Lamar, 2015f).

Hip hop is not the cause for problems in the African American community, but it cannot be proven that it does not have an impact. As Rabaka’s work indicates, hip hop has had huge impacts on society (Rabaka, 2013). Kendrick Lamar raps of wanting the fame and money that comes with hip hop in his song, “Backseat Freestyle” (Lamar, 2012b). He also acknowledges the racism that comes with it in the song, as well as in, “The art of Peer Pressure” (Lamar, 2012h). Kendrick Lamar raps about himself trying to embody the Jeazy songs on their CD by being tough in the streets, “Last time I checked I was the man on these streets” (Lamar, 2012h)! The way to fight this institution of profit and targeting of black youth through obscene images and

provocative lyrics is to win the war against the “national embrace of profits over people” (Rose, 2008, p. 92) Something, Kendrick Lamar’s music is addressing.

In an article written by Clarence Lusane entitled, “Rap, race, and politics”, rappers were used as profit rackets as black communities were ravaged by poverty by the Reagan administration in the 1980’s (Lusane, 2004). Rap is the expression of a community, but when that music has in a way been bought by major record labels, that expression can be muffled and suppressed for things that sell. Alcohol companies, clothing companies, sneaker companies, CEO’s of record companies all profit from exploitation of music. This further legitimates grief and unrest in the African American community, as alcohol and music companies use rap to sell alcohol to kids (Lusane, 2004). “We must cultivate enabling behaviors and attitudes but tether them to impassioned removal of structural racism and discrimination” (Rose, 2008, p. 93). Hip hop’s commitment is one that shows the poor conditions African Americans face in everyday life (Rabaka, 2013). The problem becomes how can a markets be saturated with positive messages when those messages do not sell? African American poverty is much higher than any other ethnic group (Alexander, 2012). Thus, the main market for major label rap, is whites. This is not to say that other people do not face economic uncertainty, but the problems of poverty in the African American community are alarming. In the era of Mass Incarceration, African Americans have continually been disenfranchised by systemic racism in the U.S. Social contract theory was made for white people by white people to continue power structures of white supremacy in one way or another (Mills, 1997). Zack calls for a reinvention of this social contract theory for an ethics of race that will help alleviate the struggles of a culture that legitimated slavery as a product of the civil society, an uncontested naturalization of slavery (Zack, 2011, p. 132).

The claim that hip hop is ruining America is a hyperbolic fallacy. Hip hop is largely controlled and peddled by corporate America, of which, most of the critics are a part of. Hip hop is understood by many in America as music based on killing and fear. Hip hop is categorized in the U.S. as dangerous for African American culture. A culture that is corrupt, contribute to the de-humanization of African Americans (Rose, 2008) (Muhammad, 2011). Historically, patterns of racist rhetoric have reinforced the connection between rap music and danger (Rose, 2008). In, “The Blacker the Berry”, Kendrick Lamar expresses this anger of being profiled, and being hated by society as a black man, through his view he can see that, “You sabotage my community, makin’ a killin’/ You made me a killer, emancipation of a real nigga” (Lamar, 2015k). Through the profits of hip hop, Kendrick Lamar does not want to forget about his community. He does not want to abandon the violence, inequality, and discrimination of his community. He raps about the problems with social structures. This is an intriguing point that Kendrick Lamar makes, as it is in line with what Rose is addressing in terms of problems in the Black hip hop community. Kendrick Lamar is trying to provide a voice for a forgotten place in America. Kendrick Lamar raps about the everyday violence of police violence, gang culture, and how this made him and those in the community who they are (Lamar, 2012).

Social movements that were enacted to end racial, gender, and other inequalities have always been met with resistance because of a hesitancy to accept other cultural norms that do not correspond to white culture (Feagin, et al., 2001). The same can be said for the hesitancy to accept rap music as an expression of injustice and wrongdoing. The idea that hip hop is dangerous, is the same as the challenges faced by social movements that call them radical for their beliefs (Rose, 2008, p. 101). If anything, Kendrick Lamar’s music has a message of love for another, a message of unity and perseverance. Politicians tend to get caught up in the criticism

of hip hop as, on the conservative side, it is viewed as a detriment to family structures (Rose, 2008). On the liberal side, while they understand the racial inequality message promoted by rap, they as well criticize rap and hip hop similar to conservatives. Stating that it is toxic to the furtherance of the black community (Rose, 2008). Kendrick Lamar's message, through his lyrics, is violent and aggressive, because of his upbringing in Compton, California. He tells his story to people without pulling any punches. Hip hop artists are role models for their presentation of music, but people are also responsible for what they consume, and what they choose to believe are made by the images they consume. Hip hop is about expression and not exploitation, it was originally about black musical legacy, the tales of the struggles of ghetto life. The spirit of a community and a way to announce to the world what was happening there. Hip hop is now profit driven, rather than community oriented. A problem that can be reversed, but it will take time and perseverance. Kendrick Lamar alludes to this reversal in *To Pimp a Butterfly* (Lamar, 2015), which addresses the problems the Black community faces. Rose presents the case that Hip hop artists are largely ignored for the good they do, and only acknowledged for the bad images. "If the images too often undermine just and loving, politically enabled communities, then we have to become the role models we need and stand against them" (Rose, 2008, p. 200). Kendrick Lamar made, *To Pimp A Butterfly* (Lamar, 2015), for this very reason, he made it for his community (Coscarelli, 2015). There are problems with everything, hip hop is no exception. But the good of hip hop can provide a music for change.

are WE gon' be ALRIGHT

Kendrick Lamar's music is about oppression, and it is a catalyst for change in a society that does not embrace change with open arms. *To Pimp a Butterfly* (Lamar, 2015) and *good kid m.A.A.d city* (Lamar, 2012), do a transcendental job of connecting what is wrong with society to a common form, music. To begin his album, *To Pimp a Butterfly* (Lamar, 2015), Kendrick Lamar introduces the greed of the music industry, "When I get signed, homie I'mma act a fool/ Hit the dance floor, strobe lights in the room" (Lamar, 2015n). Kendrick Lamar raps about the problems his community is facing is not just prison, it is an oppression fueled through greed and violence. Greed and violence separate and agitate people. Kendrick Lamar raps about the world pitting him against Black people. As Kendrick Lamar raps, he mentions that color should not matter, and the Willie Lynch theory is wrong:

Even if master's listenin', I got the world's attention/So I'mma 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/ By different shades of faces/ Then wit told me "You're womanless, 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... (Lamar & Rapsody, 2015).

The Willie Lynch theory states that African American slaves should be pitted against one another to become loyal to their masters in the 1700s, even furthering his argument of togetherness in today's age. Kendrick Lamar's focus here is on an understanding of love, race and the importance of acceptance in an era where it is not highly sought after. Our society was built on false premises of equality, as not all individuals were given equal rights. Black people were circumscribed as slaves and were perceived as less than a person. Zack offers an understanding of how our government was set up, and philosophically how a solution through a

reconfiguration of political philosophy could help create a just society. The first three egalitarian requirements for an ethics of race would be:

- I. An ethics of race would have as its units human individuals and would assume the intrinsic value and freedom of every human individual. All individuals would have the same human rights and be worthy of respect from one another. It would be morally wrong and, on that basis, legally wrong to violate anyone's rights.
- II. An ethics of race, as applicable to members of all racial groups, would be egalitarian in terms of race, meaning that racial difference would not be sufficient to constitute different moral treatment, including admission to the realm or class of moral agents or beings who were worthy of the highest moral consideration.
- III. Human equality must include an equal moral authority. This may require redistribution of material and social resources so that the disadvantaged can be recognized as moral equals by the advantaged (Zack, 2011, p. 167).

The song, "Complexion (A Zulu Love)", is a perfect example, that spurs Kendrick Lamar's message for undying acceptance regardless of affiliation (Lamar & Rapsody, 2015). While also providing an ample example of Zack's three egalitarian requirements for an ethical postmodern society. As the song calls for a love of humans as human, it also illuminates the song, "Money Trees" (Lamar & Rock, 2012). Which discusses the only way out of this place is to get in with the corporate greed. "Pick your poison tell me what you doin' / Everybody gon' respect the shooter / But the one in front of the gun lives forever / And I been hustlin' all day, this a way, that a way / through canals and alleyways, just to say / Money trees is the perfect place for shade and that's just how I feel, now, now" (Lamar & Rock, 2012). "Money Trees" (Lamar & Rock, 2012), metaphorically presents the violence of the streets and money, which can be perceived as the hip hop corporations, is the only way out, shade in a time of discomfort. An ethical approach that encourages equality amongst all races, would help alleviate the stress of an unethical society. In both songs, "Good Kid" (Lamar, 2012c), and "m.A.A.d City" (Lamar, 2012d), Kendrick Lamar raps about gangs forcing themselves upon the youth, with the youth have to choose the gang life or being harassed by the police (Lamar, 2012c) (Lamar, 2012d). In

essence, Kendrick Lamar raps about the innocence of the youth being lost to the police who raid houses for drugs that are not there, and gangs that take over the city because it is all they have. “Hood Politics” (Lamar, 2015c), describes cyclical government intervention that benefits parties and white elites in power, which violates the egalitarian requirements envisioned by Zack. The solution Kendrick Lamar raps about, would be to correct the problems of racial bias, police militarization, and love one another equally. This being similar to Zack’s solution, in order to move forward with our society (Lamar, 2015h) (Zack, 2011).

The problem is not the realization of the oppression of African Americans, rather how rights can be further analyzed and understood by all citizens. Zack explains that there needs to be an understanding of an ethics of race, a desire to improve conditions for oppressed individuals (Zack, 2012). An ethics of race is about understanding how ethics and morality fit into a formation of civil society and the social movements that come from this. Both create a multilayered human rights dilemma that addresses not only economic needs, but the needs of social sustainability (Zack, 2011). Without an ethics of race, and an understanding of the substantial necessities of individual rights as it pertains to a group, a just society cannot exist. In other words, as Zack has emphasized, there needs to be a solution to address the issue of a racial ethics infraction that pertains to specific cultures and internal collectives. This requires a vast amount of resources and complex negotiations that still may not be sufficient in gaining human rights for the African American community (Zack, 2012). She addresses this problem in her formal requirements for an ethics of race:

- IV. An ethics of race would have to be completely international and include all who were not members of nation-states. Whenever possible, an ethics of race would be more general than its applications to racial difference, racial liberation, or racism. An ethics of race would not mention specific races or racial groups and its language would be race-general.

- V. An ethics of race is a mode of discourse and practice and the principles or rules governing both of these, which is independent of politics and political theory. It allows for ethical assessment of laws and government practices, of the state, and of all other social organizations.
- VI. An ethics of race must be possible for human beings to practice by applying its principles and constructing virtues related to those principles: ought implies can in an ethics of race.
- VII. In constructing an ethics of race, ideas of unity over groups and individuals, whether physical or spiritual, should be subject to critical empirical examination before acceptance and application: do they represent the interests of all in an egalitarian way? Or do they impose the interests of some on others through fictive “wholes” that are used to mediate the interests of those who are not being fully represented? (Zack, 2011, pp. 167-168).

Alexander contextualized the ideas of fundamental powerlessness of the African American community to stand up for these rights. The era of Mass Incarceration has terrorized and submitted African American communities to a white elitist system. Kendrick Lamar’s lyrics address to the powerlessness of a society ridden by police forces. A Black community torn apart by the increasing police brutality, as the government turns a blind eye to the occurrences. In the song “Hood Politics” (Lamar, 2015c), Lamar states:

The streets don’t fail me now, they tell me it’s a new gang in town/ From Compton to Congress, it’s set trippin’ all around/ Ain’t nothin’ new but a flow of new DemoCrips and ReBloodlicans/ 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? (Lamar, 2015c).

Kendrick Lamar raps about a sense of numbness of the government toward Black communities. In a way, Kendrick Lamar is attacking the politicians that split his community, and exploit it. Zack addresses this as a failure of the historical philosophy from Plato’s work to John Stuart Mill (Zack, 2011). Conscious messages of equality are pivotal for a society to continue to a synthesis of equality. There is a priority for citizens to acknowledge injustice anyway they can, even if they rap. As Rabaka states:

Conscious, political, and message rappers cannot rupture the Hip Hop Generation's relationship with the preexisting violence, racism, sexism, heterosexism, capitalism, colonialism, militarism, alcoholism, drug addiction, and religious intolerance, etcetera, by themselves. Each and every one of us must, on the most hallowed humanist principles, make whatever sacrifices necessary to transform ourselves and our society, our kinfolk and our community, our friends and even, truth be told, our enemies. Real humanism- what I am wont to call "radical humanism"- does not start and stop with our family and friends, our specific race and gender, our fellow citizens and soldiers, or our religious brethren and sistren, but transcends all of the trappings of, literally, "man-made" contemporary nation-states, religions, languages, politics, economics, culture, and society (Rabaka, 2013, p. 336).

This implies a joint effort among citizenry to change the current structure of Mass Incarceration, in a movement towards equality for all. Marc Hill's account of equality mirrors the lyrics of Kendrick Lamar and Zack, in his work, *Nobody: Casualties of America's War on the Vulnerable, from Ferguson to Flint and Beyond* (Hill, 2016). Which describes the status of African Americans as non-human subjects, who have been admonished as unequal. There was no trial or prosecution for the murder of Michael Brown, which sent a message to the Black community that they do not matter, you are a 'nobody' (Hill, 2016). Kendrick Lamar directly addresses this problem with his lyrics, "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" (Lamar, 2015k). Creating an understanding from his view of where he fits in with current societal frameworks. The perception of current society is not one of love an inclusion, rather the inverse.

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/ That's what you're telling me, penitentiary would only hire me/ Church me with your fake prophesying that I'mma be just another slave in my head/ Institutionalize manipulation and lies/ Reciprocation of freedom only live in your eyes (Lamar, 2015k).

An analysis of the lyrics of this song, *The Blacker the Berry*, implies he understands the further imperil of the African American community. However, Kendrick Lamar acknowledges that he

has to work to do in order for equality in society (Lamar, 2015g). This, in conversation with Zack's formal requirements of race, implies that governments should understand how actions affect others. Kendrick Lamar's lyrics show a struggle with these conceptions as he raps about the evils all around him, yet he is conflicted with his influence towards the community (Lamar, 2015a). Kendrick Lamar's lyrics provide an escape from police brutality, and the evils of Mass Incarceration. A grief and pain that his community faces is tied in with Zack's requirements for an ethical society. An understanding of societal struggles is key to creating an antithesis to it.

This leads to the requirements of content within an ethics of race, which Zack states:

- VIII. Slavery, or the ownership of entire human beings, must be held to be an absolute moral wrong. The moral wrong of slavery would follow from (I) and apply to all individuals, regardless of race. The moral wrong of slavery is more important than any and all protections of property rights, and this wrong extends to control over labor in employment that interferes with autonomy, respect, and well-being.
- IX. There should be humanitarian goals of alleviating human suffering, particularly suffering that distinctively accompanies the circumstances of people with disadvantaged racial identities.
- X. New governments or revisions of existing governments should not intentionally cause those who are disadvantaged to become worse off, either in terms of material well-being or civil status; if the disadvantaged do become worse off as the result of government founding or revision, those actions should be revised.
- XI. Every moral unit, government organization, and social organization should always act in such a way so that the intent and practical effect of the action supports every human being's (subjective) ultimate valuation of his or her own life, with the possible exception of cases in which persons have acted and shown intent not to obey this principle.
- XII. An ethics of race ought not to privilege the mores, including the legal system, traditions, and culture of any human organization smaller than the whole of humanity. No one should be excluded from an ethics of race based on national, geographical, or historical contingencies (Zack, 2011).

These requirements ensure a freedom of individuals never before granted in the U.S. However, they would also be grandiose in a shaping a fairer country, not only in the U.S., but perhaps elsewhere. Zack's ethical requirements are far-reaching in scope, but they can provide a base for

a conversation of equality. “How Much A Dollar Cost” (Lamar, 2015d), and, “Alright” (Lamar, 2015a), provide an understanding of how to live in a society with everything against you. Both songs address the systemic oppression of African Americans, one with an economic understanding, and the other as a criticism of police brutality. Kendrick Lamar raps in “Momma”, “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” (Lamar, 2015i). Thus, Kendrick Lamar envisions rap as a connection to his community, which, along with Alexander, Zack, and Mills, presents a reason and wistfulness to change the oppressive structure. The most powerful way to start a movement is with music (Rabaka, 2011). An ethics based approach in understanding the struggles of other people through song and philosophy, that describe the other side of the fence (Rabaka, 2013). Hip hop provides a voice of ethics to those who have been oppressed by a perilous system, people Kendrick Lamar can preach for “if you tell me what the matter is” (Lamar, 2015i).

The arguments that Zack, Mills, Alexander make, are arguments for change that will occur through those affected by the era of Mass Incarceration. Kendrick Lamar’s anthem of African Americans being “alright” in the face of oppression, could be the start of a continued resistance towards societal norms of unethical inequity that plagues the Black community (Lamar, 2015a). We live in an era of Mass Incarceration that Alexander describes as desolate and hopeless for those that become a part of it (Alexander, 2012). The most contemporary way to change a system is through a social movement powered by a leader or role model, and most importantly, as history dictates, through music which can speak to a generation.

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 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 survivor’s 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

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 and tell the homies what I learned/ The word was respect (Lamar, 2015j).

Mortal Man

Hip hop is about music and rhythm. But it can also present a message (Rabaka, 2011). Hip hop can be a message that articulates negative images of women or further normalization of gang violence in inner cities. But, it can also bring about hope, by providing uplifting messages of resistance. Hip hop now, as Rose insists, is at war with itself, as it is not fully responsible for warped perceptions of African Americans. But it is somewhat responsible for the problems of racial imagery (Rose, 2008). Critics of hip hop have warped dispositions of what life as an African American truly means in this country. If all the focus is on hip hop and the lyrics that surround it, what about the police pullovers that have taken the lives of young people who could have had a positive impact on society? Did hip hop music cause an African American man to be shot? Rather, the bigger problem is not the music, but as this chapter has illustrated, it is the wrongs of societal constructs against African Americans (Rose, 2008).

The problem that Rose delineates and Kendrick Lamar raps about, is a combined message of love, sickness, turmoil, and despair within the African American community. African Americans have been, and are continually, marginalized in this country. As Owen Brown states, “From the convict lease system to the school-to-prison pipeline, the politics and life chances of large numbers of African American males are dominated by criminality, marginalization, and supervision by the American state” (Brown, 2014, p. 73). Crimes and misconduct are not a result of graphic hip hop music that depicts ‘gang-bangers’ and women as mere two-dimensional sex objects. Rather, it is the criminality that has been associated with African American culture because of a cyclical history of oppression that Alexander, Zach, and Mills all demonstrate.

What Kendrick Lamar has brought to the forefront is a soundtrack for a movement, his lyrics have discussed these injustices to large audiences. His art has reached places many scholars cannot go. “Hip Hop has become the signature cultural language for a large majority of black youth. It isn’t merely one alluring form of popular black music among equally “cool” genres for black teens and young adults; it is *the* music for this generation” (Rose, 2008, p.196).

With hip hop being in the limelight the way it is, Kendrick Lamar has brought a message to the studio, and presented it to the world. Kendrick Lamar, at times, falls into the stereotyping of women and problems of gang related activity, but yet he attributes that to his growing up in Compton that shaped his view of the world (Lamar, 2012c). Kendrick Lamar never claims to be a politician, rather he is an artist who has a story to tell. He inspires with his message in “Alright” (Lamar, 2015a), which illustrates that whatever African Americans go through if they stand in solidarity with one another they will be alright. What is compelling about Kendrick Lamar’s music is the message that he himself is not perfect and he is working on himself to better serve his community (Lamar, 2015k). The power of the music, and the impact that has on individuals is further illustrated by the lyrics of “Mortal Man”, “In my opinion, only hope that we kinda have left is music and vibrations, lotta people don’t understand how important it is” (Lamar, 2015j). He ends this song with an analogy of Black culture in comparison to a caterpillar coming into its own as a butterfly. A profound understanding of the conditions of oppression African Americans must face in order to get out of stagnation and do something important for the community (Lamar, 2015j). Kendrick Lamar’s music leaves open the possibility for discussion with anyone who is willing to understand his critique of society, and his belief that things can get better if we work at it.

In conclusion, Kendrick Lamar fulfills Rose's argument that hip hop provides a pivotal message, a message that puts the eras of Mass Incarceration and injustice into a conversation. Kendrick Lamar has provided two albums that incite conversations of love, hate, and oppression that deliver a powerful realization that the struggle of African Americans will continue unless something is done. He provides a soundtrack for a social movement like The Black Lives Matter Movement. We must love one another, hip hop provides a rhythm for that, and Kendrick Lamar delivers a message for compassion, mercy, and resolve of a community. “[We thus must address] the meaning of love in black experience today, calling for a return to an ethic of love as the platform on which to renew a progressive anti-racist struggle, and offering a blueprint for black survival and self-determination” (Rose, 2008, p. 271). Kendrick Lamar raps it best in the last verse of “Mortal Man”, “Just because you wore a different gang colour than mines/ Doesn't mean I can't respect you as a black man/ Forgetting all the pain and hurt we caused each other in the 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” (Lamar, 2015j). This verse concludes that African Americans need to unite and fight for rights. The deaths of Michael Brown, Trayvon Martin, Tamir Rice, Freddie Gray, Sandra Bland, Laquan McDonald, should unite a people for commonality. Reshaping perceptions that have been long engrained into a society that abuses the lives of African Americans.

Kendrick Lamar is an artist, but his art is for people to see the atrocities and understand that he too is flawed. But all in all, if we come together it will be alright. This chapter has argued that Kendrick Lamar is the voice of a movement, a catalyst for change, the song for The Black Lives Matter Movement. A movement that will be discussed in great detail in the next chapter.

Chapter 3: Black Lives Matter: Class Consciousness in a “Post-Racial” Society

Introduction

This work has so far addressed police brutality, Mass Incarceration, and a history of cultural inferiority has plagued the African American community since the days of slavery. The creation of superior perceptions of whiteness that Taylor illustrates, was created to keep the African-American population down, economically and politically (Taylor, 2016). However, what is of bigger concern that Taylor speaks of, as well as Zack, and Kendrick Lamar, is the suffering of poor people in the U.S. Which is the presumptive ending for this thesis as well as for society as a whole. There is a definitive, divisive race problem in the U.S. that is further perpetuated by police militarization and the Mass Incarceration of African Americans. There is a poverty problem in the U.S., an epidemic of poorer citizens both black and white that are continually victimized by a system that cares little for those without, and only for those with. As Taylor states:

Solidarity is only possible through relentless struggle to win white workers to antiracism, to expose the lie that Black workers are worse off because they somehow choose to be, and to win the white working class to the understanding that, unless they struggle, they too will continue to live lives of poverty and frustration, even if those lives are somewhat better than the lives led by Black workers (Taylor, 2016, p. 215)

Therefore, this chapter will further explore the history of the Black Lives Matter movement, the influence of Kendrick Lamar, and a theoretical look at the future of the movement. The main argument of this chapter will be to show that The Black Lives Matter Movement has re-awoken political activism in the U.S. that cannot be silenced by police force and criminalization. Rather, it should bring about a new era of civil society that justifies rights

and morality for all. This will lead to the conclusion that the Black Lives Matter Movement provides a foundation for continued activism, and a platform for broader movements across different ethnic and class positions.

Black Lives Matter, Kendrick has a Dream

In Kendrick Lamar's song, "Backseat Freestyle", Kendrick Lamar states, "Martin have a dream/ Martin have a dream/ Kendrick have a dream" (Lamar, 2012b). Granted this song speaks to greed and money that comes with the fame and power of hip hop music as he sits in the backseat of a car listening to hip hop. The opening of the song is somewhat of a commentary on the state of society as a whole that is encapsulated by money and power, rather than equality for all. The Black Lives Matter Movement prioritizing the first dream that Kendrick Lamar raps about, entails equality and justice for African Americans. According to their website's guiding principle page, "Black Lives Matter is an ideological and political intervention in a world where Black lives are systematically and intentionally targeted for demise. It is an affirmation of Black folks' contributions to this society, our humanity, and our resilience in the face of deadly oppression" (Cullors, et al., 2012). The Black Lives Matter Movement is a movement that was formed in 2012 after the death of Trayvon Martin, and subsequent acquittal of his killer George Zimmerman. This has sparked conversations and protests for the almost careless acts of violence committed against the Black community by the police and criminal justice system. The Black Lives Matter Movement has provided a movement many theorists such as Mills, Zack, Karl Marx, Michel Foucault, W.E.B DuBois, have all in one way addressed. A movement that stands for the rights of African Americans as human beings in society.

The U.S., as shown throughout chapters one and two, has systemically oppressed and marginalized African Americans both politically and economically. What happened in Ferguson,

Missouri can only be described as a social media firestorm that connected millions of people in an instant to an event that happened in a neighborhood in Ferguson. It was tweeted, recorded, and passed around numerous times, thanks in large part to social media and the availability of technology. In an article by Bijan Stephen, Stephen explains that as opposed to the Civil Rights Movement, The Black Lives Matter Movement has the ability to share injustice in an instant, “technology has helped make today’s struggle feel both different from and continuous with the civil rights era. All the terror and greatness we associate with that moment is right in front of our faces, as near to us as our screens” (Stephen, 2015). With this instant availability of technology, the question becomes what now? The answer to this question is answered in the scholarship of Zack, Taylor, and Mills, who demonstrate that rights of African Americans have always come about because of social activism (Zack, 2011) (Taylor, 2016) (Mills, 1997). African Americans have been continually left out of policy making decisions that largely affect them. The Civil Rights Movement demonstrated racial policy is oppressive. Activist and Black revolutionary Dr. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. not only fought for guaranteed rights with everything he had, but he also fought to gain respect and inclusion in a society that wholly rejected African American ideas and causes (Newman, 2004). Today, The Black Lives Matter Movement faces a similar problem with police brutality, with the absence of government representation in a country that supposes equality. Yet, Blacks are continually victimized by the justice system at an alarming rate (Hill, 2016).

What happened since the days of slavery, prison labor, Jim Crow, and Mass Incarceration, is an increase of police brutality. Police brutality that targets Black youth who have been deemed criminal by a system that uses those who are impoverished as a demonstration of the power of elitism (Muhammad, 2011). What is at question is not race and ethics that Zack

explores, rather it is more about the interworking dynamics of continual au courant perceptions of individuals whom the state in the 1980's deemed as dangerous and unfit for society. The era of Mass Incarceration was masked by the 'War on Drugs,' which spawned a hip hop movement that addressed the issues of police brutality and mass arrests that were unjustified (Chang, 2005). But hip hop is now demonized as a problem of culture, and The Black Lives Matter Movement faces similar problems of demonization (Taylor, 2016). The Black Lives Matter Movements' main goal is to gain solidarity for the Black community at large for the unjustified shootings of African American. As well as ridiculous prison sentences African Americans are sentenced to. In order to provide concrete movement to those in the Black community that have never had one (e.g. transgender and bisexual individuals) (Cullors, et al., 2012). Kendrick Lamar's lyrics have been symbolic of this movement, because they allow a conversation about the many wrongs against the African American community. Taylor's work consistently illuminates this perception of a challenged culture, a culture that has created thugs and criminals, while those who make this claim do not take into account the historical barriers that have been created to keep African Americans in a place of inferiority (Taylor, 2016). This has been demonstrated throughout history from slavery, education, Jim Crow, Prison Labor, housing. In addition to these factors is the era of Mass Incarceration, and the police militarization that has come with it (Taylor, 2016) (Alexander, 2012) (Blackmon, 2008).

The Black Lives Matter Movement is attempting to fulfill a dream that Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., that many people have in this newly developed civil society, which, encourages new ways of thinking and encourages a new world that is based on equity. There is of course ambiguities between people in the movement, but according to the website, The Black Lives Matter Movement is "working for a world where Black lives are no longer systematically and

intentionally targeted for demise. We affirm our contributions to this society, our humanity, and our resilience in the face of deadly oppression” (Cullors, et al., 2012). This, regardless of other goals, is the best place to start a movement, address the problem at the base level and continue to strive for new avenues of activism that addresses not only Mass Incarceration, but the after effects of the economic and political degradation of this era.

Police...HANDS UP!

Trayvon Martin was murdered by a man who saw him as a threat, as a criminal. What happened that night, and the following weeks and trial that saw his killer George Zimmerman go free, created a fire within the Black community. A fire that would burn passionately for justice and truth of a young Black man who was perceived as a criminal. The trial painted Trayvon as a thug and a criminal who had it coming, yet as the trial continued there was no real indictment of Trayvon doing any wrong or deserving of arrest (Pearson & Mattingly, 2013). The Black Lives Matter Movement came about because of this injustice, because one should not have to prove their innocence on the streets to avoid being executed by anyone. The movement started because people saw the injustice take place over social media through a tweet or a video. The interconnectedness of social media provides a large base of people to a growing movement. This plays on the idea of ethic morality of which Zack speaks of respect for others motivates recognition of their rights, of which is needed to recognize humans as such (Zack, 2011). Ethics motivate individuals to stand up for justice. Ethics have become the main theme of The Black Lives Matter Movement, a theme that Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. and slavery abolitionists before him leaned upon. Ethics and understanding of the strains of societal mores and norms can ultimately doom certain people because philosophically the design of government was set up for

elitism rather than ethic universality (Zack, 2011). Thus, there is a requirement for the demos to demand rights and equality.

West makes a similar point about the idea of race becoming of grave importance in the distinction of how African Americans are able to get to a place of equal footing, “We have to recognize that there cannot be relationships unless there is commitment, unless there is loyalty, unless there is love, patience, persistence” (West & Ritz, 2010, p. 160). In order to build these relationships there must be a trust in community, a solidarity with one another that Marek Kohn and Paul Seabright discuss a trust within culture and the evolution of communities that trust one another. Marek Kohn states, “It is upon the basis of trust thus established that individuals can go out to become actors in a marketplace” (Kohn, 2008, p. 2). The problem with the war on drugs policy, is that trust between community and government is nonexistent because of the constant oppression of voices in the Black community which hinders trust from developing. The trust is gone within the Black community, due to the terrors of slavery, and continues government racial policy that has attempted to keep them in the dark for as long as slavery has been eradicated. Logically how could anyone trust a system that devalues their humanity? As Alexander explains, the Civil Rights Movement had to vicariously fight for rights that were assumed guaranteed, but were not granted rights because of the color of their skin. “With extraordinary bravery, civil rights leaders, activists, and progressive clergy launched boycotts, marches, and sit-ins protesting the Jim Crow system”(Alexander, 2012, p. 37). This appears to be the case today, as journalist Jeff Chang discusses the current problem with police by examining the death of Michael Brown, a prominent figure for The Black Lives Matter Movement. Chang briefly underlines the problem of police brutality in Ferguson, as a place of unrest (Chang, 2016). What occurred in Ferguson was not about criminality, but rather morality, and the ethical right to live.

Trust cannot exist when the police use military grade equipment that at any time can enter your house because of the suspicion of drugs on the premises (Do Not Resist, 2016). Trust further deteriorated when a government can enforce the shooting of a teenager, then leave his body in the street for hours as a symbol to the people in the community (Taylor, 2016). The Black Lives Matter Movement is this generation's continuation of Martin Luther King's dream of restructuring society, where there are no boundaries between race and class. The Black Lives Matter Movement is an answer to police brutality, criminalization, and a system of oppression that has been in place in the U.S. Demonstrations in Ferguson chant, "Hands up! Don't shoot!" protesters in New York chant, "I can't Breathe", protesters throughout the U.S. hold up signs, "No justice, No peace!" Police continue to discriminate "where to wage the war, but they also discriminate in their judgments regarding whom to target outside of the ghetto's invisible walls"(Alexander, 2012, p.133).

The Black Lives Matter Movement ultimately is about delineating that Black lives not only matter, but are important our society to function. While resisting in a racist society that empowers racist institutions (Shor, 2015). The protest against police in Ferguson is only a start to a continued resistance that must overcome the acquittal of George Zimmerman, and Darren Wilson for the deaths of Trayvon Martin and Michael Brown. Through the lyrics of Kendrick Lamar, and the protests and resistance of Black communities, "change is gonna' come" in a time where police have seemingly unlimited authority (Baldwin, 1963). "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 getting' weak and my gun might blow/But we gon' be alright" (Lamar, 2015a). "Alright" (Lamar, 2015a), has become the battle-cry of the movement. A movement that is resisting police and society that calls them thugs and criminals. As Mills states, "most whites don't think about it or don't think

about it as the outcome of a history of political oppression but rather as just “the way things are”” (Mills, 1997). The Black Lives Matter Movement carries the burden that King dreamed about, a society of inclusion of all classes to resist political and social violence against the poor and downtrodden.

What about Change?

The main problem facing resistance movements is unity, and while it has been noted throughout that The Black Lives Matter Movement have created a new, Black, public sphere. Unifying with other disparaged groups cannot hurt The Black Lives Matter Movement, but rather it will help strengthen the movement’s message of police violence and social economic inequalities. The Blacks Lives Matter Movement has created a fire, a fire that will not be extinguished by police force or government suppression. The Black Lives Matter Movement has placed upon itself the weight of the problems of racial institutions in the country. “The Black Lives Matter Movement, from Ferguson to today, has created a feeling of pride and combativeness among a generation that this country has tried to kill, imprison, and simply disappear” (Taylor, 2016, p. 190).

This, however, may not be enough for Black liberation, because of the racial and class based institutions that remain in place. As well as the joblessness that permeates society for poor people that are not Black. While The Black Lives Matter Movement gives hope to Black people, the lyrics of Kendrick Lamar provides a soundtrack for the movement that addresses the problems of the community it was written for. There remains the problem of the poor Appalachian worker, the Mexican family in fear, the Asian people who experience almost passive racism, and now the Muslim people who are deemed as the ‘enemy’ in our country. What about the rights of these people? What about justice for a coal worker left jobless and

scraping by for a living? Karl Marx spoke of the revolution of proletariat workers over the bourgeoisie capitalist owners, a class warfare that is based on workers needs and the greed that capitalism imposes upon them (Marx & Engels, 2014). Marx foresaw capitalism ridding itself of the proletariat class, through industrialized labor the proletariat are viewed as disposable labor, labor that can always be replaced. We now live in a cyber age, where labor is limited and increasingly decreasing. Nick Dyer-Witheford, in his work, *Cyber-Proletariat*, examines this ever growing cyber governmental elite structure that is eviscerating the lower classes around the world. The ‘cyber-vortex’ is an unstoppable abomination that is currently overwhelming workers with mechanization and the loss of work that in turn creates resentment and exacerbated forms of distrust and inequity (Dyer-Witheford, 2015).

Through The Black Lives Matter Movement there can be a unification with the workers of the country that have been wronged. There can be an encouragement of the lower classes that there is an alternative to the way society is currently arranged. An alternative to demand for the government to include those left out of the arrangement of the social contract and demand better livelihoods. The Black Lives Matter Movement can become a catalyst for a country in solidarity with one another, a grouping of races. Taylor states:

The struggle for Black Liberation requires going beyond the standard narrative that Black people have come a long way but have a long way to go-which, of course, says nothing about where it is that we are actually trying to get to. It requires understanding the origins and nature of Black oppression and racism more generally. Most importantly, it requires a strategy, some sense of how we get from the current situation to the future. Perhaps at its most basic level, Black liberation implies a world where Black people can live in peace...[I]t would mean living in a world where Black lives matter. While it is true that when Black people get free, everyone gets free, Black people in America cannot “get free” alone. In that sense, Black liberation is bound up with the project of human liberation and social transformation (Taylor, 2016, p. 194).

This is important to understand the role that Kendrick Lamar and The Black Lives Matter Movement play in the ongoing battle for justice against inequity. It is up to movements and artists like Kendrick Lamar who have a voice to give to those who do not have one. In a system with a plethora of racist flaws in it, the era of Mass Incarceration, has evolved into a class battle (Alexander, 2012). A battle where an elitist white state locked up those it saw as unemployable, or as a source for the cheap labor that was needed in this ever-growing capitalist age. The elites played off of these racial antagonisms which institute a class caste system in order to remain in a dominant position of the racial hierarchy. By pitting poor whites against African Americans throughout history, and with the depictions of Blacks as criminal and a danger to society (Muhammad, 2010). Kendrick Lamar raps about this problem, where he entices the audience that Black people have always been looked down upon and discriminated against because of the color of his skin, by the look in his eyes. As James Baldwin stated, “When any white man in the world says “give me liberty or give me death”, the entire white world applaud. When a Black man says exactly the same thing, he is judged a criminal and treated like one, and everything possible is done to make an example of this bad nigger so there won’t be any more like him” (I Am Not Your Negro, 2016). The ultimate denial of African Americans in the U.S. continues today. The gap between race and class becomes opaque. Capitalism has exploited this racism, as it becomes a tool to divide people and create new perceptions, of which The Black Lives Matter Movement is attempting to put an end to. However, media such as Fox News, portray protesters as criminals rather than human beings with a cause.

The Black Lives Matter Movement is not only a movement for Black liberation in our society, but ultimately a platform for an all-inclusive movement for all oppressed peoples, that breaks through racial barriers and impediments created by racial hierarchies. This is easier said

than done, as is most revolutionary theories of interpretive justice, but it is plausible that together the majority (Blacks, poor whites, Latinos/Latinas, Muslims) could come together for a society that is based not upon the color of your skin. Zack articulates how such a change can occur by acknowledging that race is stuck in our society, and has not really seen a change since the 1960's (Zack, 2012, p. XVI). Race is tricky in America, for the very reasons of the intertwined class system that permeates every citizens conscious, of which West admits is a battle we must continue to fight throughout our lives. Class structures, patriarchy, and race are all connected in this country through a government that insists it upon society (West, 1993). We therefore need what Alexander calls "an ethics of race" to overcome our societal burden of race incarceration (Zack, 2012). "Overall, the ethical questions that arise from the tradition of philosophy concern how we few (who know that we have choices) should live" (Zack, 2011, p. 26). This is an important delineation to make, as we come to the impasse of whether it is ethically right to kill. This is the conversation The Black Lives Matter Movement and the music of Kendrick Lamar are presenting to the public, a message of love not hate, and a message of oppression not choice. A continued message for solidarity of humanity that has been made clear through protests that do not demand more death, only peace and justice for everyone. The groundwork for Zack's theory of ethics through philosophical grounds has come to come to pass with hip hop rhetoric and the lyrics of Kendrick Lamar and The Black Lives Matter Movement. The ideas of slavery, segregation, and apartheid were all created by governments that believed in a superior race and culture, and thus racism has been undisturbed by government practices, and has been practiced to enforce these norms (Zack, 2011, p. 46). Therefore, resistance is a key component in a creation of an equal ethical society.

Zack's understanding of ethics and mores of society can help further the Black liberation movement. Adopting the ideas that all humans have the same rights, and are worthy of the same respect, could create more unity in our society (Zack, 2011, p. 167). An understanding that these new ethical frameworks should not benefit mores, and privilege certain systems of government more than others. Legal systems should not condone racial barriers and there should be continuing goals of humanitarianism that should alleviate human suffering (Zack, 2011, p. 168). Zack, Alexander, Taylor, Kendrick Lamar, and The Black Lives Matter Movement all demonstrate there is a chance that Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.'s dream could become a reality. Black faces must lead the charge for equality in America, because they know about the wrongs of society (Taylor, 2016). With the leadership of The Black Lives Matter Movement, the impact of race scholars, and lyrics of Kendrick Lamar, the U.S. can become a 'land of the free'. While this may be a treacherous journey for all involved, the era of Mass Incarceration has devastated our society. It has become a part of our troubled humanity in this country that fails to connect us as humans and rather as cogs in a system. "The challenge before us is to connect the current struggle to end police terror in our communities with an even larger movement to transform this country in such a way that the police are no longer needed to respond to the consequences of inequality" (Taylor, 2016, p. 219). With Black understanding and leadership, it becomes the task of the new civil rights leaders to develop a voice for Black rights, for the rights of the mistreated, the poor, and those who suffer. Delivering a revolution that creates solidarity among all citizens. Kendrick Lamar sums up Black pride and acknowledgement of the persuasion Black people hold:

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'm a break it down and put my game in a song (Lamar, 2015e).

Therefore, Kendrick Lamar has become an influence, and a soundtrack for the Black liberation Taylor speaks of. His music is for people to listen and decide that perhaps time for change is now, and no longer can we live in a world of police militarization and a fear of racism. The time for change is now, and The Black Lives Matter Movement embodies this required change. It is a necessity for individuals to stand hand in hand and protest “Black Lives Matter”, because it encompasses more than just words, it encompasses the hope of a better life for all involved. As Kristian Williams suggest in his work, *Our Enemies in Blue: Police and Power in America*, the job of a social movement is to make a bad situation better, regardless of if the social movement is perfect (Williams, 2015, p. 288). The hope is that The Black Lives Matter Movement will continue to fight for equality in society that has in essence forbid equality to African Americans, through cyclical historical patterns. That the status quo of repression in this country through the era of Mass Incarceration, will be dealt with through protest and a continuing effort to liberate Black people everywhere (Williams, 2015).

Is there a Conclusion?

“The more I read and research, the more I understand”. This seems like a simple concept to most, but it is deeper than just an obvious statement of fact. These thoughts I had while writing, are just thoughts, I am never sure if I can ever understand. Understanding of race is difficult and impossible, because we all lead different lives, and face different but sometimes similar struggle. Zack calls race a bogus concept developed by those in power (Zack, 2011). Whether these struggles involve run-ins with police because of how you look, or the struggle to feed your family because of poverty. The music of Kendrick Lamar presents an escape from these situations by rapping about them through choreographed lines that articulate a problem, and provide a passionate response to Mass Incarceration. “The more I read, the more I understand that I need to read. I need to do more than read.” If activism in civil society such as The Black Lives Matter Movement is to continue, we must all get on board and not read about it from an ivory tower. As stated earlier, it is impossible to fully understand what someone else is encountering in everyday life, but the point of The Black Lives Matter Movement is to try to understand, and continue to search for equality for all.

Hip-hop’s connection with activism can be traced back to its origins, and now is no different. However, through constant commercialization and the profit rackets they create, hip hop may have lost some impact in terms of being a voice. The article by the Guardian reflects this problem in the hip hop industry, with rappers like Lil Wayne addressing racism as nonexistent because of his wealth (Pearce, 2016). This statement is ignorant of the situations happening around him, the deaths of innocent black men to police violence, or the high incarceration rates that have ballooned to over two million in the last decade. Kendrick Lamar has created a civil society within rap through his music. Individuals who want to understand and

contribute to a movement can listen to Kendrick Lamar. However, Kendrick Lamar is only a musician, and people must make a choice through their own beliefs to make a change. Providing source material, and firsthand accounts of what it is like to live in a world that fundamentally rejects your humanity is what Kendrick Lamar is illustrating in his lyrics. His lyrics are bigger than just him gaining fame, they deal with humanity and the understanding that the Black community has suffered.

“The more I research, the more I understand that I need to read. The more I read, I begin to realize I need to be active in my beliefs. I need to do more than read and research. I must be a part of something I believe in, that will help more than myself.” Perhaps my thoughts are utopian in nature, but they speak to the urgency of The Black Lives Matter Movement. The era of Mass Incarceration needs to be contested, and The Black Lives Matter Movement demonstrates what Alexander would call an acceptable measure to fight the tyranny of Mass Incarceration. A movement that can continue to break down racial barriers and capitalistic societal structures that have kept the black community in a straightjacket. “Racism...has always been a means by which the most powerful white men in the country have justified their rule, made their money, and kept the rest of us at bay. To that end, racism, capitalism, and class rule have always been tangled together in such a way that it is impossible to imagine one without the other” (Taylor, 2016, p. 216). With this said, Kendrick Lamar’s album *To Pimp a Butterfly* (Lamar, 2015), alludes to him in a hotel room thinking about the war that was raging on the streets, the war he was fighting in showbiz, and the similarities of the situations

Perhaps where we go from here is the most difficult part about this project. The main question that arises is what about those still in jail, whose rights are forever lost to a system that did not want them anyways? Perhaps this is another paper that can be developed by this thought

of ‘what now?’ Research would tell me that reparations to families affected would be sufficient. I am not sold on that route because you cannot put a price tag on a community and call it even. But they can provide hope to people who have never had any. As Alfred Brophy states in his work, *Reparations Pro & Con*, “Reparations, if carefully crafted, thus hold out the hope of accomplishing two important, elusive goals: correcting an injustice and building something more positive for the future” (Brophy, 2006, p. 179). Reparations perhaps are not the worst idea, but how do we solve the problems of community disenfranchisement, or murders of kids who never can experience their next birthday? Do you write the parents a check and say ‘we are sorry?’ Perhaps recognition and justice are where I would go further with this project, expanding on the ideas of cultural inferiority and the lack of justice for Black people. Hip hop provides a basis for people to recognize injustice differently than a book could, because it is relatable narrative, but hip hop is just an open-ended conversation that never really ends. It can be grappled with any many different ways. How can we then have justice if the conversations had are always open-ended with no real end-game? I believe police brutality is one of the many cogs in a white elitist system that disenfranchises people of color, and to move toward a society based on community, based on trust and equality. Perhaps that is where my research will lead me. This seems hopeful, but many times hope is all we have. With the activism of The Black Lives Matter Movement, and Zack’s ethics for society as a base, we can have change.

This thesis opens up, perhaps a different and more nuanced form of understanding the effects of Mass Incarceration. Hip hop and pop culture provide new areas of research, they provide different, layered answers to continued activism in the U.S. What I perceive going forward is that pop culture will continue to have an impact on the way we think and perceive policy and race. Many instances of this are already occurring, as athletes with substantial

amounts of influence are speaking out on the wrongs of our society in an attempt to undo them, or at least bring awareness to them. Social media is now a way for anyone to connect and discuss problems at a grander scale. Ultimately, this thesis has presented that hip hop and social movements are connected in a myriad of ways. The lyrics of Kendrick Lamar provide a stimulus to a community that needs a voice, and Kendrick Lamar seemingly provides that voice. A voice that The Black Lives Matter Movement has used to actively protest the wrongs of Mass Incarceration. If anything, I hope the reader takes away that pop culture has political potential that it intersects with the problems of society. The Black Lives Matter Movement is not a moment in time, but rather a movement, the likes of which I hope will continue if this country is to come together and support the rights of those that have been systematically oppressed for so long.

References:

- 13th. 2016. [Film] Directed by Ava DuVernay. United States of America: Kandoo Films.
- Alexander, M., 2012. *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness*. New York: The New Press.
- Baldwin, J., 1963. *The Fire Next Time*. New York: The Dial Press.
- Blackmon, D. A., 2008. *Slavery By Another Name: The re-enslavement of Black People in America From The Civil War To World War II*. New York: Doubleday.
- Brophy, A. L., 2006. *Reparations Pro & Con*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Brown, O., 2014. From the Philadelphia Negro to the Prison Industrial Complex: Crime and the Marginalization of African American Males in Contemporary America. *Spectrum: A Journal on Black Men*, 3(1), pp. 71-96.
- Chang, J., 2016. *We Gon' Be Alright*. New York: Picador.
- Cooper, H. L., 2015. War on Drugs: Policing and Police Brutality. *Substance Use & Misuse*, 50(8-9), pp. 1188-1194.
- Coscarelli, J., 2015. *Kendrick Lamar on His New Album and the Weight of Clarity*. [Online] Available at: https://www.nytimes.com/2015/03/22/arts/music/kendrick-lamar-on-his-new-album-and-the-weight-of-clarity.html?_r=0 [Accessed 3 April 2017].
- Cullors, P., Tometi, O. & Garza, A., 2012. *Black Lives Matter*. [Online] Available at: blacklivesmatter.com [Accessed 20 March 2017].
- D., C., 1997. *Fight The Power: Rap, Race, and Reality*. New York: Dell Publishing.
- Danielson, C., 2013. *The Color of Politics: Racism in The American Political Arena Today*. New York: Praeger.
- Do Not Resist*. 2016. [Film] Directed by Craig Atkinson. United States of America: Vanish Films.
- Dyer-Witheyford, 2015. *Cyber-Proletariat: Global Labour in the Digital Vortex*. London: Pluto Press.
- Dyson, M. E., 1993. *Reflecting Black: African-American Cultural Criticism*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Feagin, J., Vera, H. & Batur, P., 2001. *White Racism: The Basics*. 2nd ed. New York: Routledge.
- Gray, J. P., 2012. *Why Our Drug Laws have Failed and What We Can Do About It*. 2nd ed. Philadelphia: Temple University Press.
- Green, T., 2008. *From the Plantation to the Prison: African-American Confinement Literature*. Macon: Mercer University Press.
- Hayes, F. W. I., 2012. Hope and Disappointment in Martin Luther King Jr's Political Theology. In: R. E. Birt, ed. *The Liberatory Thought of Martin Luther King Jr.*. Lanham: Lexington Books, pp. 299-320.
- Hill, M. L., 2016. *Nobody: Casualties of America's War on the Vulnerable, from Ferguson to Flint and Beyond*. New York: Atria Books.
- Hinton, E., 2016. *From The War On Poverty To The War On Crime: The Making of Mass Incarceration in America*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
- hooks, b. & West, C., 1991. *Breaking Bread: Insurgent Black Intellectual Life*. Boston: South End Press.

I Am Not Your Negro. 2016. [Film] Directed by Raoul Peck. United States of America: Velvet Film.

King Jr., M. L., 1963. *Letter From a Birmingham Jail*. [Online]

Available at: http://www.africa.upenn.edu/Articles_Gen/Letter_Birmingham.html

[Accessed 26 March 2017].

Kitwana, B., 2004. The Challenge of Rap Music from Cultural Movement to Political Power. In: M. Forman & M. A. Neal, eds. *That's The Joint: The Hip-Hop Studies Reader*. New York: Routledge, pp. 341-350.

Kohn, M., 2008. *Trust: Self-Interest and The Common Good*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Lamar, K., 2012a. *Bitch, Don't Kill My Vibe*. [Sound Recording] (Top Dawg Entertainment).

Lamar, K., 2012b. *Backseat Freestyle*. [Sound Recording] (Top Dawg Entertainment).

Lamar, K., 2012c. *Good Kid*. [Sound Recording] (Top Dawg Entertainment).

Lamar, K., 2012d. *m.A.A.d City*. [Sound Recording] (Top Dawg Entertainment).

Lamar, K., 2012e. *Sherane A.K.A Master Splinter's Daughter*. [Sound Recording] (Top Dawg Entertainment).

Lamar, K., 2012f. *Sing About Me, I'm Dying of Thirst*. [Sound Recording] (Top Dawg Entertainment).

Lamar, K., 2012. *good kid m.A.A.d city*. [Sound Recording] (Top Dawg Entertainment).

Lamar, K., 2012g. *Swimming Pools (Drank)*. [Sound Recording] (Top Dawg Entertainment).

Lamar, K., 2012h. *The Art Of Peer Pressure*. [Sound Recording] (Top Dawg Entertainment).

Lamar, K., 2015a. *Alright*. [Sound Recording] (Top Dawg Entertainment).

Lamar, K., 2015b. *For Sale? (Interlude)*. [Sound Recording] (Top Dawg Entertainment).

Lamar, K., 2015c. *Hood Politics*. [Sound Recording] (Top Dawg Entertainment).

Lamar, K., 2015d. *How Much A Dollar Cost*. [Sound Recording] (Top Dawg Entertainment).

Lamar, K., 2015e. *i*. [Sound Recording] (Top Dawg Entertainment).

Lamar, K., 2015f. *Institutionalized*. [Sound Recording] (Top Dawg Entertainment).

Lamar, K., 2015g. *Kendrick Lamar: 'I Can't Change The World Until I Change Myself First'* [Interview] (29 December 2015g).

Lamar, K., 2015h. *King Kunta*. [Sound Recording] (Top Dawg Entertainment).

Lamar, K., 2015i. *Momma*. [Sound Recording] (Top Dawg Entertainment).

Lamar, K., 2015j. *Mortal Man*. [Sound Recording] (Top Dawg Entertainment).

Lamar, K., 2015k. *The Blacker The Berry*. [Sound Recording] (Top Dawg Entertainment).

Lamar, K., 2015l. *These Walls*. [Sound Recording] (Top Dawg Entertainment).

Lamar, K., 2015m. *u*. [Sound Recording] (Top Dawg Entertainment).

Lamar, K., 2015n. *Wesley's Theory*. [Sound Recording] (Top Dawg Entertainment).

Lamar, K., 2015o. *You Ain't Gotta Lie (Momma Said)*. [Sound Recording] (Top Dawg Entertainment).

Lamar, K., 2015. *To Pimp A Butterfly*. [Sound Recording] (Top Dawg Entertainment).

Lamar, K. & Rapsody, 2015. *Complexion (A Zulu Love)*. [Sound Recording] (Top Dawg Entertainment).

Lamar, K. & Rock, J., 2012. *Money Trees*. [Sound Recording] (Top Dawg Entertainment).

Levitz, B., 2015. *Bill Clinton admits his crime law made mass incarceration 'worse'*. [Online]

Available at: <http://www.msnbc.com/msnbc/clinton-admits-his-crime-bill-made-mass-incarceration-worse>

[Accessed 20 March 2017].

- Love, B. L., 2016. Good Kids, Mad Cities: Kendrick Lamar and Finding Inner Resistance in Response to FergusonUSA. *Cultural Studies; Critical Methodologies*, 16(3), pp. 320-323.
- Lusane, C., 2004. Rap, Race, and Politics. In: M. Forman & M. A. Neal, eds. *That's The Joint!: The Hip-Hop Studies Reader*. New York: Routledge, pp. 351-362.
- Marx, K. & Engels, F., 2014. *The Communist Manifesto*. New York: International Publishers Co.
- Mills, C. W., 1997. *The Racial Contract*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press.
- Muhammad, K., 2011. *The Condemnation of Blackness: Race, Crime, and the Making of Urban America*. 1st ed. Boston: Harvard University Press.
- Newman, M., 2004. *The Civil Rights Movement*. Westport: Praegar Publishers.
- Parenti, M., 2008. *Democracy for the Few*. 8th ed. New York: Cengage Learning.
- Pearce, S., 2016. *Rap's Fraught history with Black Lives Matter: 'I didn't sign up to be no activist'*. [Online]
Available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/music/2016/nov/10/rap-black-lives-matter-lil-wayne-vic-mensa-beyonce-asap-rocky>
[Accessed 20 March 2017].
- Pearson, M. & Mattingly, D., 2013. *Gun, drug texts feature in new Trayvon Martin shooting evidence*. [Online]
Available at: <http://www.cnn.com/2013/05/23/justice/florida-zimmerman-defense/index.html>
[Accessed 20 March 2017].
- Provine, D. M., 2007. *Unequal Under Law: Race In the War On Drugs*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Rabaka, R., 2011. *Hip Hop's Inheritance: From the Harlem Renaissance to the Hip Hop Feminist Movement*. Lanham : Lexington Books.
- Rabaka, R., 2013. *The Hip Hop Movement: From R&B and The Civil Rights Movement To Rap and the Hip Hop Generation*. Lanham: Lexington Books.
- Rose, T., 1994. *Black Noise: Rap Music and Black Culture in Contemporary America*. New York: Wesleyan University Press.
- Rose, T., 2008. *The Hip Hop Wars: What We Talk About When We Talk About Hip Hop- and Why It Matters*. New York: Basic Books.
- Sanders, S., 2016. *Bill Clinton Gets Into Heated Exchange With Black Lives Matter Protester*. [Online]
Available at: <http://www.npr.org/2016/04/07/473428472/bill-clinton-gets-into-heated-exchange-with-black-lives-matter-protester/>
[Accessed 20 March 2017].
- Seabright, P., 2004. *The Company of Strangers: A Natural History Of Economic Life*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Shor, F., 2015. "Black Lives Matter": Constructing a New Civil Rights and Black Freedom Movement. *New Politics*, 15(3), pp. 28-32.
- Spanos, B. & Grant, S., 2016. *Songs of Black Lives Matter: 22 New Protest Anthems*. [Online]
Available at: <http://www.rollingstone.com/music/pictures/songs-of-black-lives-matter-22-new-protest-anthems-20160713>
[Accessed 20 March 2017].
- Spence, L. K., 2011. *Stare in the Darkness: The Limits of Hip-hop and Black Politics*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Stephen, B., 2015. *Social Media Helps Black Lives Matter Fight the Power*. [Online]
Available at: <https://www.wired.com/2015/10/how-black-lives-matter-uses-social-media-to->

fight-the-power/

[Accessed 1 April 2017].

Taylor, K.-Y., 2016. *From #BLACKLIVESMATTER To Black Liberation*. Chicago: Haymarket Books.

Tilly, C., 2004. *Social Movements, 1768-2004*. Boulder: Paradigm Publishers.

Tocqueville, A. D., 1984. *Democracy In America*. New York : New American Library.

Warren, R. C., 2016. *Black Lives Matter's real agenda: The movement is at war with black husbands and fathers*. [Online]

Available at: <http://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2016/jul/28/black-lives-matters-real-agenda/>

[Accessed 25 March 2017].

Watkins, S. C., 2005. *Hip Hop Matters*. Boston: Beacon Press.

West, C., 1993. *Race Matters*. Boston: Beacon Press.

West, C. & Ritz, D., 2010. *Living and Loving Out Loud*. 2nd ed. New York: SmileyBooks.

Williams, K. R., 2015. *Our Enemies In Blue: Police and Power in America*. 3rd ed. Oakland: AK Press.

Yancy, G., 2004. *What White Looks Like: African-American Philosophers on The Whiteness Question*. New York: Routledge.

Zack, N., 2011. *The Ethics and Mores of Race*. Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc..

Zack, N., 2015. *White Privilege and Black Rights: The Injustice of U.S. Police Racial Profiling and Homicide*. Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield.