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Petr Hortenský

University of Pardubice
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Petr Hortenský

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Vedoucí bakalářské práce: **doc. Šárka Bubíková, Ph.D.**
Katedra anglistiky a amerikanistiky

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doc. Mgr. Jiří Kubeš, Ph.D.
děkan

Mgr. Olga Roebuck, Ph.D.
vedoucí katedry

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ANNOTATION

This bachelor thesis focuses on how rap music describes racial issues in its lyrics. The paper describes what race, racism, and rap music are, what the main eras in the history of rap music are, and whether the music composed in these eras changed in terms of its themes and lyrics. The paper also analyses mainly three rap songs that are focusing on racial issues throughout the eras, it points out the most important lines from each song and based on them evaluates how the song is describing or focusing on the racial topic.

KEYWORDS

Racism, race, rap music, song analysis, song lyrics

ANOTACE

Bakalářská práce se zabývá tématem, jakým způsobem rapová muzika popisuje rasové problémy v jejích textech. Tato práce popisuje co je to rasa, rasismus a rapová muzika, jaké jsou hlavní éry historie rapové muziky a také jestli se muzika publikovaná v těchto dobách změnila v jejím tématu a textu. Tato práce také rozebírá primárně tři rapové písně napříč všemi érami, poukazuje na nejdůležitější části jednotlivých písní a na jejich základě hodnotí, jak píseň popisuje nebo se zaměřuje na rasovou situaci.

KLÍČOVÁ SLOVA

Rasismus, rasa, rapová muzika, rozbor písně, test písní

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Introduction

Rap music is one of the most dominant music genres of all time. It was also a music genre, which might be considered as one of the most controversial and which was a topic of many debates. The reason why this issue is discussed is the lyrics of such songs. Rap music is sometimes very violent, aggressive, and inappropriate. The songs are attacking not only police officers or women but they can also be very hateful towards people of diverse race. However, there are also many rap songs, which are trying to take the whole situation in its hands and fight against the evil which is between people. This is the reason why this thesis deals with the way rap music pictures racism and, at the same time, what the background of these songs, pinpointing race issues, is.

The thesis is divided into several parts, each of which focuses on different aspects. Throughout the paper, there are mentioned several rap songs on which each issue and topic is described and analyzed. However, the main songs that are used for the analysis and are connected to these individual topics are “Changes” by Tupac Shakur, “Fuck Tha Police” by the rap group N.W.A. and “I’m not racist” by rapper Joyner Lucas. The reason for choosing these songs is that they closely describe the main topics of this paper not only from the point of their lyrics, but they also describe the time in which they were written in. Also, the beginning of this paper introduces to the reader the main rap eras and what rap and its subgenres are.

The song “Changes” by Tupac Shakur is a song that fights against hate and racism in a positive and friendly way. It depicts many situations related to life on the streets, the life of African Americans, police brutality, and many more. Tupac Shakur is also one of the most influential rap artists there ever was and even today, after many years of his death, he is still considered as one of the best rappers of all time. In 2017 Tupac was inducted into the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame, which even more proves how famous Tupac was.¹

The next song “Fuck Tha Police” was chosen mainly because of its controversial lyrics. And since one of the topics of this paper is police brutality, there is probably not a better choice than this song. Although it might not be the most appropriate rap song, it still influenced rap music a lot and during the years of its release, police brutality became even more discussed.

¹ Rock & Roll Hall of Fame, “Snoop Dogg Inducts Tupac Shakur into the Rock & Roll Hall of Fame 2017,” posted June 17, 2017, YouTube video, 9:13, <https://youtu.be/VYFZFIZ5SBM>

And since “Changes” and “Fuck Tha Police” are rather older songs, the thesis also includes the song “I’m not racist,” because it represents the recent era and is as interesting in terms of lyrics as the other two songs.

The first topic that is highlighted in the analysis is police brutality and injustice towards African Americans. Taking into consideration this issue, the thesis describes a few examples of events that occurred in the past and which are related to police and their brutality against black citizens. The paper also analyzes few lines of the songs and further describes the whole situation in the past.

The next topic is a race because it cannot be omitted while talking about racism and the racial differences in rap music. The thesis introduces what race is, which terms are connected to race and which words are considered appropriate and suitable to use and which, on the other hand, are described as racist and inappropriate.

The paper then continues with racism and how racism is described in rap music. Yet again, the songs are analyzed based on this topic and the paper depicts the situation around it.

Racism is then developed in the next part which focuses on the so-called N-words. And since these words are used in many songs, they are the focus of the analysis, as well. Additionally, the thesis states which of these words are appropriate and what the appropriateness of the usage of these words is.

The last two topics of the paper are the crack epidemic that happened in the past in the USA and are also the concept of “Black family” which can be seen in many African American communities. Those two topics are closely related to each other because both of them were linked to the black communities.

Each analysis of the song and its lines is supported by various academic sources. Since rap music is a rather new music genre, usage of non-academic sources is included, such as interviews with rap artists and others.

1. The main eras of rap music

Rap music can be divided into several eras or stages in its evolution. Even though there are pieces of evidence of rap having African roots, this paper is going to pinpoint just the most famous rap eras to maintain the theme of this paper.² As stated in *The Aesthetics of Rap* by Mtume ya Salaam, “there have been at least four distinct periods in the development of rap music so far.”³ Additionally, according to Mtume ya Salaam, in the early 1970s, an era of hip-hop DJs begun. Most of the songs are not even documented, the hip-hop DJs were playing their songs in public places such as parks, on the streets, or even during house parties.⁴ But since the lack of sources from this era is quite significant, this paper is going to introduce The Old school rap era first.

Following the aforementioned era was the “Old School rap” era which, as stated by Mtume ya Salaam, begun in 1979 and ended roughly in 1983.⁵ In addition, during these years rap music started to be seen as a new distinct music genre, and rap artists began to produce and labeled their songs through several independent record companies, mainly around the area of New York. Also, various elements of Hip hop music, such as “graffiti art, break-dance, and rap music,” were seen across America and soon after that in Europe and other parts of the world.⁶ When it comes to songs, there is not a better example of “Rapper’s Delight” by a rap group Sugarhill gang. As stated by Maurice L. Johnson more than fifty thousand copies a day were sold shortly after the song was released and later it reached double platinum.⁷ Furthermore, Johnson describes how the song was so different from other songs composed before this era and how “Sugarhill gang’s version of rap successfully captured the feel of Hip Hop music into a fifteen-minute record, telling stories, providing humor, and most importantly, they spoke with slang terminology.”⁸ The imaginary end of this era was in late 1983 at the time when the rap group called “Run-DMC” released their debut album “Run D.M.C.”⁹

² Richard Shusterman, "The Fine Art of Rap," *New Literary History* 22, no. 3 (1991): 615, Accessed December 11, 2020. doi:10.2307/469207.

³ Mtume Ya Salaam, "The Aesthetics of Rap," *African American Review* 29, no. 2 (1995): 311. Accessed December 11, 2020. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/3042309>

⁴ Salaam, "The Aesthetics of Rap," 311.

⁵ Salaam, "The Aesthetics of Rap," 311.

⁶ Salaam, "The Aesthetics of Rap," 311.

⁷ Maurice L. Johnson, “A historical analysis: The evolution of commercial rap music” (Unpublished Master's thesis, The Florida state University, 2011), 19.

⁸ Johnson, “A historical analysis”, 20.

⁹ Salaam, "The Aesthetics of Rap," 311.

In the 1980s rap music experienced rapid change. This period was significant in the way rap artists, also called rappers or rap singers, presented their work. They produced music as their professions and the whole rap genre became prominent. In the history of rap music, the 1980s is known as a “Golden rap era” and is well known for its radical change not only in the style of rap music.¹⁰ As stated by Run, a rapper from the rap group “Run-DMC”, in the song “King of Rock”: “It’s all brand new, never ever old school.”¹¹

This change in lyrics and rap music itself is also described by Maurice L. Johnson in his thesis where he states “in response to the socio-economic conditions of New York City during the mid-1980s, rap music took a shift towards social consciousness and addressing issues plaguing the ghettos.”¹² In addition, according to Johnson, simultaneously with the change in lyrics of music, there was a change among rap artists concerning their perception of the situation. Rap artists started to realize the true potential and impact which rap music can have on the current supporters of their music and also on the next generation. However, this change did not affect all of the rappers in the same way. On the one hand, there was a well-known rap group Public enemy, and on the other hand, no less well-known rap group N.W.A., which is covered later in this thesis. The difference between these two rap groups was that “while Public Enemy represented the socially-conscious New York audience, Compton’s NWA would cater to black inner city youth nationwide, introducing a new subgenre called gangsta rap,” which is covered later.¹³

The last and also recent period began after 1989. During these years, the subgenre gangsta rap became even more popular, more rappers started their careers and hip hop music was played more every day.¹⁴ One of the most iconic rappers was definitely Tupac Shakur who influenced not only hip hop culture but also politics with his endeavors against racism and police injustice. However, during the 21st century, the hip-hop music industry was faced with probably its worst years ever. According to Hayley Milliman, “the advent of streaming services affected all genres, including hip hop. Despite the monetary effects of the shift in music delivery, hip hop retains its prominence, influencing musicians of all genres.”¹⁵ But despite this

¹⁰ Salaam, "The Aesthetics of Rap," 311.

¹¹ Adam Bradley and Andrew Lee. Dubois, *The Anthology of Rap*. New Haven (CT: YALE University Press, 2011), 119.

¹² Johnson, “A historical analysis”, 32.

¹³ Johnson, “A historical analysis”, 32.

¹⁴ Johnson, “A historical analysis”, 32.

¹⁵ Hayley Milliman, “The Complete History of Hip Hop,” posted February 13, 2021, <https://blog.prepscholar.com/hip-hop-history-timeline>

fact, hip-hop music remained highly playable and very attractive to the public. Among the most popular rappers was for instance Dr. Dre, Jay-Z, or Eminem. The last mentioned was one of the first white rappers who “conquered” this type of music and became an important hip-hop figure. His song “Lose yourself” won the Academy Award for the best song and together with the semiautobiographical movie about him called “8 Mile”, has been a great success not only among his fans but also among critics.¹⁶

1.1.Gangsta rap and political rap

Rap and hip-hop music can also be divided into several subgenres. But for the purpose of this thesis, only a few of these subgenres are mentioned and used. One of the most controversial and influential subgenres of rap music were Gangster rap, also known as “Gangsta” rap, and Political rap, both of which emerged during the 1980s and 1990s.¹⁷ Although both of these subgenres are in many ways similar, there are still a few indications that make them unique. Political rap pinpoints social issues and, as explained by Lakeyta M. Bonnette, “political rap is rap music that provides political information by detailing political strategies, injustices, and grievances.”¹⁸ Additionally, its follower, Gangster rap, on the other hand, delivers a picture of the lifestyle of American citizens. But the biggest difference between these two subgenres is in their style. Rap music delivers its lyrics more aggressively and violently than political rap and therefore is sometimes criticized.¹⁹ But despite this, this is the same reason why rap music gained so much popularity during the 1980s. As described in an article by Michael Quinn, Gangster rap describes issues clearly and straightforwardly, it is “about ‘takin’ what’s yours’ pure and simple, without regard for consequences, just for your own pleasure and feeling of empowerment.”²⁰

There are many themes which gangster and political rap songs have, but according to Catherine Beighey and N. Prabha Unnithan, some of them occur more frequently in rap songs than other themes. The themes are: “Redefined concept of the black family as the racial community, Lost economic opportunities, Educational bias, Health care inequality, Criminal

¹⁶ “Hip-Hop in the 21st Century,” Encyclopædia Britannica, accessed February 20, 2021, <https://www.britannica.com/art/hip-hop/Hip-hop-in-the-21st-century>

¹⁷ Greg Tate, "Gangsta rap," Encyclopædia Britannica, November 26, 2013. <https://www.britannica.com/art/gangsta-rap>.

¹⁸ Lakeyta M. Bonnette, *Pulse of the People: Political Rap Music and Black Politics*, (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2018), 22.

¹⁹ Bonnette, *Pulse of the People*, 23.

²⁰ Michael Quinn, "'Never Shoulda Been Let out the Penitentiary': Gangsta Rap and the Struggle over Racial Identity," *Cultural Critique*, no. 34 (1996): 74. Accessed January 9, 2021. doi:10.2307/1354612.

justice discrimination, Police brutality, Mass media misrepresentation, and Racial Genocide Conspiracy.”²¹ Especially violence in the lyrics of rap music was very common and during the 1980s it was significantly rising. As reported by Denise Herd, according to her analyses 27% of the popular rap songs released in the early years of rap music contained violence. However, the percentage of violence in the lyrics of the most popular rap songs released from 1990 to 1993 increased to almost 55%. In addition, the attitude towards such songs and lyrics changed as well and people started to support these songs even more. During the years from 1979 to 1984, about 50% of asked had a negative attitude towards the songs and 0% had a positive attitude, the rest had either neutral or ambivalent/negative attitude. Yet again, the main change occurred during the years 1994 to 1997. The negative reactions dropped to 13% whereas the positive ones raised to 75%.²² But apart from this, as stated by Michael Quinn, rap became a worldwide cultural phenomenon and despite its sometimes controversial and radical themes, it was used in commercial spots for many companies including McDonald’s, Sneakers, or N.B.A. basketball and it was also used for educational purposes. Sesame Street, for instance, used rap music to teach the alphabet to its viewers.²³

2. Police brutality

One of the most common themes of gangster rap is police brutality. It is not surprising that rap songs which “fight” against such a thing were, and some of them still are, very popular and highly playable even today. One of the examples of such a song is “Changes” by a rapper Tupac Shakur, also shortly known as 2Pac. One of the lines states: “Cops give a damn about a negro. Pull the trigger, kill a nigga, he's a hero.”²⁴ There are many cases of a police officer killing African American citizens. For instance, as stated in the book *Racial Spectacles: Explorations in Media, Race, and Justice*, in the middle of the night on March 3rd 1991, George Holliday recorded several police officers beating Rodney King, a thirty-five year old African American man, and roughly dozen other officer were looking without a will to help. Although four of the

²¹ Catherine Beighey, and Unnithan N. Prabha, "Political rap: the music of oppositional resistance," *Sociological Focus* 39, no. 2 (2006): 135-136. Accessed January 9, 2021. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/20832291>.

²² Denise Herd, "Changing Images of Violence in Rap Music Lyrics: 1979-1997," *Journal of Public Health Policy* 30, no. 4 (2009): 399-400. Accessed January 9, 2021. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/40542235>.

²³ Quinn, ""Never Shoulda Been Let out *Cultural*," 82.

²⁴ 2pac, "2Pac - Changes (Official Music Video) ft. Talent," posted July 5, 2011, YouTube video, 4:40, <https://youtu.be/eXvBjCO19QY>

officers were discharged, officer Lauren Powell and sergeant Stacey Koon were found guilty. Rodney King was rewarded with 3.8 million dollars.²⁵

Another instance of that situation, which is also described by Jonathan Markovitz in his book, happened five and a half years after the case of Rodney King. A nineteen-year-old Javier Ovando, a Honduran immigrant, was a victim of a shooting. Police officers Raphael Perez and Nino Durden shot Ovando four times in the neck and chest. Both of the officers claimed to shoot in self-defense. According to their claims, Ovando rushed into the room used for monitoring gang activities with a semiautomatic pistol. After this incident was Ovando imprisoned for 23 years. However, after two and a half years, it turned out that Perez attempted to steal from a police station cocaine worth over a million dollars which served as evidence.²⁶ Additionally, as it is further described in the book, in order to “secure a plea bargain”, Perez took back his official proclamation confessing that Ovando’s case was falsified and that the gun was placed next to Ovando’s body by him and Durden. Thanks to Perez’s testimony is this case known as “the most consequential police corruption scandal in Los Angeles history.”²⁷ In the end, Ovando received fifteen million dollars from the court.²⁸

2.1. Tupac Shakur’s political activities

Unfortunately, the two examples mentioned above are not the only cases of police brutality in history, and many other rap singers mentioned this issue as well. “Changes” was not the only Tupac’s song that has a serious theme and points out a serious issue. Tupac himself was not only a rap artist but also an activist and sort of a politician. As stated by Karin L. Stanford in her article, “Tupac’s political work can be divided into five periods, which corresponds to the chronology of his life.”²⁹ The first two periods happened from 7 to 19 of Tupac’s age. During these two periods, Tupac was planning events at school, several programs for the local communities in which he was living and, during the second period, Tupac decided to share his experience of living on the streets through rap lyrics and also becoming an active member of African Panthers.³⁰ The third period began when 19 years old Tupac became a professional musician and rap artist. During this period Tupac published several songs and albums, including

²⁵ Jonathan Markovitz, *Racial Spectacles: Explorations in Media, Race, and Justice* (New York: Routledge, 2011), 74.

²⁶ Markovitz, *Racial Spectacles*, 74–75.

²⁷ Markovitz, *Racial Spectacles*, 75.

²⁸ Markovitz, *Racial Spectacles*, 74–75.

²⁹ Karin L. Stanford, "Keepin' It Real in Hip Hop Politics: A Political Perspective of Tupac Shakur," *Journal of Black Studies* 42, no. 1 (2011): 9. Accessed January 15, 2021. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/25780789>.

³⁰ Stanford, "Keepin' It Real," 9 - 10.

the song “Trapped” which is another song that pinpoints police harassment and brutality.³¹ In its lyrics, Tupac is describing how police forces are treating African American citizens and how what was Tupac’s attitude towards these issues. Interestingly enough, during releasing this song, Tupac was attacked by a police officer for alleged jaywalking, as he states in a press conference in 1991.³² During the fourth period, Tupac was trying to put African American communities together. He developed and formed a “Thug Ideology”. The idea of Thug life philosophy was further developed into the “Code of Thug Life” which was supposed to connect the communities and gang members together and fight against injustice.³³ As stated before, the theme of bringing communities together as one big family is a common theme used in many songs not only by Tupac, and it is mentioned later in this thesis. In the fifth and last period of his political life, Tupac founded a rap group Outlawz which had a similar purpose as Thug life. “The term Outlawz stood for Operating Under Thug Laws as Warriors.³⁴ Tupac died in hospital after several gunshots on September 13, 1996.³⁵

2.2. Police brutality portrayed by Joyner Lucas and N.W.A.

Although the song “I’m not racist” by Joyner Lucas, which is also analyzed in this paper from different points of view, focuses mainly on the theme of the black and white race and their differences, it also slightly covers the theme of police brutality in its lyrics. As it is mentioned later, the lyrics of the song are divided into two parts regarding who is its “author” in a way. The second part, which is rapped from the point of view of a black person, describes what it is like to be black and how these people are treated by police. “Fuck, I’m exhausted. I can’t even drive without the cops tryna start shit. I’m tired of the systematic racism bullshit,” and “and get stopped by the cops and not know if you 'bout to die or not. You worry 'bout your life, so you take mine,” are lines which cover this theme.³⁶ The main topic of these lines is police controls. The black protagonist argues that he is scared of being pulled over by a police officer because of the possible danger he might get into. In the article made by Anita Chabria and Philip Reese on the server Miami Herald, a 31-year-old Ryan McClinton states that he got pulled over more than 35 times in one year and the reason for that was, from his point of view, “driving while

³¹ Stanford, "Keepin' It Real," 12.

³² Tupac Amaru Shakur Unofficial Channel, “Tupac’s Jaywalking Press Conference, November 12, 1991 (HQ),” posted September 14, 2012, YouTube video, 1:17, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hBKq6AZtoF0&feature=youtu.be>

³³ Stanford, "Keepin' It Real," 16-17.

³⁴ Stanford, "Keepin' It Real," 18.

³⁵ Stanford, "Keepin' It Real," 19.

³⁶ Joyner Lucas, “Joyner Lucas - I’m Not Racist,” posted November 11, 2017, YouTube video, 6:55, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=43gm3CJePn0>

black.”³⁷ And McClinton’s case is not an exception. Ozzie Williams in the same article states that he got pulled over for “holding a cellphone while driving, though Williams said he didn’t have the device in his hand.” According to William’s words, the police officer told him that he would not receive a ticket if he confessed that he violated the law because of using his phone while driving. William refused and the officer then stated that he smelled marijuana in his car. Even though the police officer did not confirm any of his accusations, the whole situation was not a pleasant experience for William. “I was really afraid because I had never met that kind of aggression before. He made me say something that wasn’t true,” stated William.³⁸ And this is not an issue of only the past but also of today. According to the server mappingpoliceviolence.org, there were only 18 days throughout the 2020 year in which police did not kill anybody. Also “black people were 28% of those killed by police in 2020 despite being only 13% of the population.”³⁹ In comparison to the research made by National Violent Death Reporting System during the years 2009 and 2012, “the victims were majority white (52%) but disproportionately black (32%) with a fatality rate 2.8 times higher among blacks than whites. Most victims were reported to be armed (83%); however, black victims were more likely to be unarmed (14.8%) than whites (9.4%) or Hispanic (5.8%) victims.”⁴⁰ Obviously, it cannot be generalized and said that every case of all these was simply because of police brutality and injustice, but it still is a terrifying number. And as stated next in this paper, some of the African American citizens did not and maybe still do not feel safe and see police forces as a potential danger rather than protection.

Taking into consideration the theme of police brutality and rap music, there is probably not a better example of a song that got so much attention than “Fuck Tha Police” by a rap group N.W.A. As stated by Annelise Green in her article, N.W.A, or also known as “Niggaz Wit Attitudes”, released the song “Fuck Tha Police” on the album called “Straight Outta Compton” in 1988.⁴¹ Typically for this group, each line of the song is rapped by a different member of the group, by Ice Cube, MC Ren, Eazy E, and Dr. Dre. The song and its lyrics pictures a scene in

³⁷ “‘Driving while black’ gets you pulled over so much, one guy says, ‘I use Uber,’” Miami Herald, Last modified May 03, 2017, <https://www.miamiherald.com/news/nation-world/national/article148290184.html> ‘Driving

³⁸ Miami Herald, Driving while black.”

³⁹ “Mapping Police Violence,” Mapping police violence, last modified February, 27, 2021, <https://mappingpoliceviolence.org/>

⁴⁰ “Deaths Due to Use of Lethal Force by Law Enforcement,” National Center for Biotechnology Information, Lst modified August 7, 2018,

<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC6080222/>

⁴¹ Annelise Green, “The Rhetoric of N.W.A.’s ‘Fuck Tha Police,’” *Pepperdine Journal of Communication Research* 6, no. 10 (2018): 9. Accessed January 15, 2021. <https://digitalcommons.pepperdine.edu/pjcr/vol6/iss1/10/>.

which each member of the rap group plays a role in a trial against a police officer. At the end of the song the police officer loses the trial and is found guilty.⁴² The song follows one particular scheme in which it is trying to describe police and law as the source of evil and them, African American citizens, like the victims. When in comparison with, for instance, the song “Changes,” this approach is very different.

According to the article, The Rhetoric of N.W.A.’s “Fuck Tha Police” by Annelise Green, “primarily in the media, African-Americans (especially in low-income neighborhoods) are framed as violent criminals.”⁴³ And police forces, on the other hand, are usually depicted as moral and righteous forces.⁴⁴ The song tries to change this view the other way around, as also described in the article by Annelise Green. The song challenges the listener’s feelings in a way that he or she has to think about whether the police officers are truly flawless.⁴⁵ For instance, in Ice Cube’s lines “A young nigga got it bad 'cause I'm brown. And not the other color, so police think. They have the authority to kill a minority.”⁴⁶ This line makes the listener think and reevaluate whether the police forces are acting right and by the laws or whether they are potentially dangerous because of their possible power over the citizens.⁴⁷ It could be seen as a similar case mentioned above with Tupac, when he, in his own words, was put under arrest in a tough way because of not showing his identity card. This idea is further developed in MC Ren's line: “And the motherfuckin' weapon is kept in. A stash spot for the so-called law.”⁴⁸ This line suggests that MC Ren, as an African American, is not feeling safe and that neither police nor rules offer a safe place for him to live in.⁴⁹ This sort of framing of police forces can be also seen in another line rapped by MC Ren in which he is being pulled over by an officer. After asking him what he did and why he is being arrested, the police officer says: “Cause I feel like it!”⁵⁰ This creates a situation in which the listener feels like injustice is shown here and creates a picture in which the police are yet again seen as the protagonist.⁵¹

Also as stated by Marc Zwelling in his essay “Caught on video: Help — It’s the police!,” the opinion and the overall trust changed throughout the years. “In a 2012 Ipsos poll, compared

⁴² Green, “The Rhetoric of N.W.A.'s,” 11.

⁴³ Green, “The Rhetoric of N.W.A.'s,” 11.

⁴⁴ Green, “The Rhetoric of N.W.A.'s,” 11.

⁴⁵ Green, “The Rhetoric of N.W.A.'s,” 11.

⁴⁶ N.W.A., “Fuck Tha Police,” posted October 29, 2018, YouTube video, 5:45, <https://youtu.be/ADdpLv3RDhA>

⁴⁷ Green, “The Rhetoric of N.W.A.'s,” 11.

⁴⁸ N.W.A., “Fuck Tha Police.”

⁴⁹ Green, “The Rhetoric of N.W.A.'s,” 12.

⁵⁰ N.W.A., “Fuck Tha Police.”

⁵¹ Green, “The Rhetoric of N.W.A.'s,” 12.

with five years earlier, trust in the police had declined 12 percentage points (57% said they trust them). Except for financial advisors, it was the largest decline in public confidence in any of the 15 occupations covered in the polls.”⁵² Additionally according to the same poll described by Marc Zwellung fifty-four percent of minorities together with fifty-one percent of whites agreed that people of certain ethnic or racial groups were stopped by police because the officers believed that these race members were more likely to commit a crime than other people.⁵³ And if compared to the previously mentioned statistics of death by police officers from the years of 2009 and 2012, these statistics might be an answer for the change in the public opinion about police.

To conclude, police brutality is a theme that appeared and is still commonly appearing in rap songs. The song “Changes” covers this issue in some of its lines where it is trying to point out the statements of Tupac, the author of the song, himself and what it means to be an African-American citizen in the USA during these years. “Fuck Tha Police” by N.W.A. on the other hand is much more aggressive, it is trying to point out the issue in a lot of different ways and that is by framing police. The whole song is composed as a trial in which a police officer is actually the one that broke the law. The song flips the whole situation around African-American people being seen as villains and puts police forces in their usual shoes. It targets the listener’s emotions and tries to make him feel like police forces are potentially dangerous because of their power. And as Annalise Green states “N.W.A rose awareness of systematic injustice with cops and the justice systems, informed people of the predetermined life created by racism toward the African-American community within Compton, and reoriented feelings towards cops/judges/black urban youth in Fuck Tha Police.”⁵⁴

3. Race

People tend to categorize and judge every aspect and personality trait of others and put them in certain arrangements. This is a basic human quality and it is, simply said, completely natural. As stated by Budil, the first person who used the term race as a term for dividing people into several groups was F. Bernier (1684).⁵⁵ Bernier divided people into 5 “especies ou races”

⁵² Marc Zwellung, “Caught on video: Help — It’s the police!” Research Gate, posted December, 2020, https://www.researchgate.net/publication/346967256_Police_and_Racism, 2.

⁵³ Zwellung, “Caught on video”, 2-3.

⁵⁴ Green, “The Rhetoric of N.W.A.’s,” 13.

⁵⁵ Ivo T. Budil, Vladimír Blažek, and Vladimír Sládek, *Dějiny, Rasa A Kultura: Sborník Příspěvků Z Interdisciplinárního Symposia O Problematice Ras* (Ústí nad Labem: Dryada, 2005), 33.

although in which he did not include Native Americans.⁵⁶ Other experts as Linné or Blumenbach divided the human species into four groups. J. J. Viery, on the other hand, separated people into two species which he afterward divided into six races.⁵⁷

It is important to discuss this problem from different points of view. For instance, as Alexandre Marcellesi mentions, economists studying labor market discrimination sometimes create models involving race as an “independent variable and interpret estimates of the coefficient attached to it as estimates of the causal effect of race.”⁵⁸ On the contrary, he points out that leading advocates of the counterfactual approach argue that we cannot simply treat race as a cause.⁵⁹

There are also many different definitions of what race is and the term can also be used in various different fields. According to Wade, the most common attitude among these definitions is that they all try to categorize people by their physical significance. For instance, “in the United States, the term race generally refers to a group of people who have in common some visible physical traits, such as skin colour, hair texture, facial features, and eye formation.”⁶⁰ Race can also stand for the geographical separation of population, such as “the ‘African race,’ the ‘European race,’ and the ‘Asian race.’”⁶¹ Besides, the term race can also be applied to “linguistic groups (the ‘Arab race’ or the ‘Latin race’), to religious groups (the ‘Jewish race’), and even to political, national, or ethnic groups with few or no physical traits that distinguish them from their neighbours (the ‘Irish race,’ the ‘French race,’ the ‘Spanish race,’ the ‘Slavic race,’ the ‘Chinese race,’ etc.).”⁶²

However, there are also opinions that race simply does not exist. Clarence Gravlee, a medical anthropologist at the University of Florida, argues that “the idea that race corresponds to different types of humans is really an illusion.”⁶³ Additionally, Gravlee explains that “this isn’t to say race isn’t real, scholars say. Rather, the race is a social and political reality as opposed to a scientific one.”⁶⁴ Still, the main issue connected to race is that the public never

⁵⁶ Budil et al., *Dějiny, Rasa A Kultura*, 33.

⁵⁷ Budil et al., *Dějiny, Rasa A Kultura*, 33.

⁵⁸ Alexandre Marcellesi, “Is Race a Cause?” *Philosophy of Science* 80, no. 5 (2013): 650, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.1086/673721?seq=1>

⁵⁹ Marcellesi, “Race,” 651.

⁶⁰ Peter Wade, Audrey Smedley, and Yasuko I. Takezawa, “Race,” *Encyclopedia Britannica*, July 28, 2020, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/race-human>.

⁶¹ Wade et al., “Race,”

⁶² Wade et al., “Race,”

⁶³ “Your big questions about race, answered,” CNN, last modified August 18, 2020, <https://edition.cnn.com/interactive/2020/us/racism-questions-answers/?active=>.

⁶⁴ CNN, “Your Big Questions.”

agreed on how a race will be defined. As Clarence Gravlee adds, “scholars have documented anywhere from three to upwards of 60 races, depending on the classifying characteristics. But there is no set of traits that corresponds to all of the people in a given race.”⁶⁵ There might be a difference when it comes to people’s health. “For example, African Americans are more likely than White people to die of heart disease, while Native Americans are more likely to have diabetes.”⁶⁶ However, this difference might only be because of racism. And not genetics. That being said, these health differences based on race might only be because of environmental factors which are connected to economic statuses and different accesses to health care and quality food.⁶⁷ Duana Fullwiley, a medical anthropologist at Stanford University, states that “there are biological consequences to living in a body defined by race, but that does not mean there are innate biological differences that can allow any one person to sort the world’s people into consistent racial groups.”⁶⁸ In addition, as stated by Peter Wade on the server Britannica:

Physical features are insufficient clues to a person’s ethnic identity. They reveal nothing about a person’s culture, language, religion, and values. Sixth-generation Chinese Americans have American ethnicity; many know little or nothing about traditional Chinese culture, just as European Americans and African Americans may know little or nothing about the cultures of their ancestors.⁶⁹

3.1.Expressions connected to race

Nevertheless, there are certain terms, which are connected to race and with which are people describe others. Nowadays, the most common terms, when it comes to race, are “black”, “white” or other. According to Nicole Chavez, “‘Black’ refers to dark-skinned people of African descent, no matter their nationality. ‘African American’ refers to people who were born in the United States and have African ancestry.”⁷⁰ All of these mentioned terms are nowadays acceptable. Also, as stated in the Cambridge dictionary, language is evolving all the time, and terms that might not be acceptable in the past might be acceptable today. It is up to the user of the words to know how to use them and how not.⁷¹

Also, another past issue was slavery, which is closely related to racism and is also a topic of many rap songs. This topic can be heard in the song “I’m not racist” by Joyner Lucas.

⁶⁵ CNN, “Your Big Questions.”

⁶⁶ CNN, “Your Big Questions.”

⁶⁷ CNN, “Your Big Questions.”

⁶⁸ CNN, “Your Big Questions.”

⁶⁹ Wade et al., “Race,”

⁷⁰ CNN, “Your Big Questions.”

⁷¹ “Are idioms that use ‘black’ and ‘white’ offensive?” A blog from Cambridge Dictionary, posted July 8,2020, <https://dictionaryblog.cambridge.org/2020/07/08/are-idioms-that-use-black-and-white-offensive/>

As it was mentioned above, in the first verse of the song, one of the lines, rapped by a white man, says: “Talkin' 'bout slavery like you was around back then. Like you was pickin' cotton off the fuckin' ground back then. Like you was on the plantation gettin' down back then.”⁷² The other character of the song reacts in the second verse with: “And even if I wasn't picking cotton physically. That don't mean I'm not affected by the history. My grandmama was a slave, that shit gets to me.”⁷³ The fact that history still affects many people is obvious. And as Joyner Lucas did with his song, there are other rap artists who “remind” people of events from the past in their lyrics and thus they try to “fight” against racism and injustice towards people of a different race. However, rap music was not always “fighting” with the right “weapons” and its lyrics were a topic of many debates.

4. Racism

Rap music, especially in its earliest years, received a lot of criticism mainly because of its violent and in some cases alleged racism. According to Rachel E. Sullivan, “from the start, the public viewed hip-hop culture and rap music through a racist lens.”⁷⁴ And it was not only a case of the public but also of politicians, mainly white politicians. For instance, Tupac Shakur got attacked by Vice President Dan Quayle as stated by Sullivan. The reason was Tupac’s songs which, according to Quayle, promote violence.⁷⁵ Another example was President George Bush who criticized the song “Cop Killer” by Ice-T and Body Count.⁷⁶ Sullivan also adds that “ironically, neither politician had heard these albums; in fact, Dan Quayle did not even pronounce Tupac's name correctly, and Bush failed to realize that Body Count was in fact a heavy metal group.”⁷⁷

But to fully understand the context of the songs it is important to know, what racism is and what are the possible rules, under which one can state which behavior is racist and which is not. According to the server Britannica, racism is “a belief that humans may be divided into separate and exclusive biological entities called “races”; that there is a causal link between inherited physical traits and traits of personality, intellect, morality, and other cultural and

⁷² Joyner Lucas, “I’m Not Racist,”

⁷³ Joyner Lucas, “I’m Not Racist,”

⁷⁴ Rachel E. Sullivan, “Rap and Race: It's Got a Nice Beat, but What about the Message?” *Journal of Black Studies* 33, no. 5 (2003): 608. Accessed February 6, 2021. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3180978>.

⁷⁵ Sullivan, “Rap and Race,” 607-608.

⁷⁶ Sullivan, “Rap and Race,” 608.

⁷⁷ Sullivan, “Rap and Race,” 609.

behavioral features; and that some races are innately superior to others.”⁷⁸ Another definition by Ramon Grosfoguel, is that racism is “Racism is a global hierarchy of superiority and inferiority along the line of the human that have been politically, culturally and economically produced and reproduced for centuries.”⁷⁹ In addition, George Fredrickson states that the term racism is mostly used to define hateful behavior from one ethnic group towards the other and its results.⁸⁰ When it comes to America, according to the server Britannica:

The racism dictated that different races (chiefly blacks and whites) should be segregated from one another; that they should have their own distinct communities and develop their own institutions such as churches, schools, and hospitals; and that it was unnatural for members of different races to marry.⁸¹

4.1. Rap music and its effect on racism

Especially the communities became one of the most common topics in rap music. Rap artist wrote their songs not only about the life on the streets but also about their communities, wars against other communities and gangs, and some of the rappers, Tupac Shakur for instance, composed songs in which they encourage others not to fight but to help each other.

The popularity of rap music and why do young people listen to rap could also be described as a case of communities. The survey made by Rachel E. Sullivan explored the relation between preference and racial identity. Sullivan expected four different hypotheses related to rap music and racial differences. The first was that “Black adolescents would have stronger preferences for rap music than White adolescents.”⁸² The second hypothesis was that black adolescents would agree to statements saying “rap is a truthful reflection of society,” and others.⁸³ The third hypothesis was that “Black adolescents would listen to a wider variety of rap acts,” and the last hypothesis was that “Whites (who are rap fans) would be most likely to say that rap has affected their opinions about racism.”⁸⁴ The outcomes were pretty much the same for each hypothesis. There were no differences between the answers from white and African-

⁷⁸ Audrey Smedley, "Racism," *Encyclopedia Britannica*, August 21, 2020, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/racism>.

⁷⁹ Ramon Grosfoguel, "What Is Racism?" *Journal of World-Systems Research* 22 (1), 10. <https://doi.org/10.5195/jwsr.2016.609>.

⁸⁰ George M. Fredrickson, *Racism: stručná Historie* (Praha: BB art, 2003) 15.

⁸¹ Smedley, "Racism."

⁸² Sullivan, "Rap and Race," 611.

⁸³ Sullivan, "Rap and Race," 611-612.

⁸⁴ Sullivan, "Rap and Race," 612.

American listeners except for the fourth hypothesis. White fans of rap music answered more that rap music affected their attitude towards racism than African-Americans listeners.

But even though there was an overall racial difference in this hypothesis, most of the respondents disagreed that rap music had any effect on them regarding their opinion on racism. However, the most interesting outcome was with the open-ended questions in which Sullivan asked the respondents why they listen to rap music. Some of the most interesting answers were: “Because it tells the truth about how us Black people live being raised in the ghetto. (Black female, 15),” “teach me things or tell me things about life. (Black male, 17),” and “because some of the things the rappers rap about is the same type of shit that happens in everyday life to somebody [sic] from the hood. (White male, 18).”⁸⁵ Sullivan also adds that “even the response by this 18-year-old White male is written in the third person, indicating some distance between this young man and ‘somebody [sic] from the hood.’”⁸⁶ This survey might suggest that the differences between the races regarding rap music were growing weak, but since it was made in 2003 the outcomes today might be radically different.

4.2. “White” Racism in rap music

However, while talking about racism and racial differences in rap music, it is also important to state the “other side” of the issue. Even though rap songs that are related to racism are mostly written around African Americans and how they are treated unjustly in a lot of cases, some songs are, on the other hand, targeting white people. For instance, the song “No Vaseline” by a rapper Ice cube, a former member of the rap group N.W.A., contains lines such as: “White man just ruling. The Niggas With Attitudes? Who ya foolin’?” or “Cause you're getting fucked out your green. By a white boy, with no Vaseline.”⁸⁷ These lines could be described as racist towards white people in a way. Nevertheless, this song served mainly as a “diss track,” a song made by one artist to disrespect others, in this case towards his former members of the N.W.A. group and their, at that time, the current manager who was white.⁸⁸

There is, however, another example of a racist song, which depicted the issue of animosity towards a different race. A French rapper Nick Conrad published on the server YouTube a song called “Hang White people.” This nine-minute song, which was published in

⁸⁵ Sullivan, “Rap and Race,” 614-615.

⁸⁶ Sullivan, “Rap and Race,” 615.

⁸⁷ Muthaphuckka, “Ice Cube - No Vaseline (N.W.A Diss),” posted July 14, 2007, YouTube video, 5:13, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bvRc7pwnt0U>

⁸⁸ “Diss Track,” Urban Dictionary, posted August 28, 2006, <https://www.urbandictionary.com/define.php?term=diss%20track>

2018, contained lines such as this: “I go into creches and kill white babies. Catch them quickly and hang their parents.”⁸⁹ Also, the video clip of the song depicted a white man being tortured by this rapper. He got kicked in the head before he was hanged by the rapper. The video was suspended after 10 days of the release and Nick Conrad “has been found guilty of incitement to violence and given a suspended 5 thousand euros fine.”⁹⁰

Charles Gallagher, “a sociologist a sociologist at La Salle University in Pennsylvania who researches white racial attitudes,” stated “we went from being a privileged group to all of a sudden becoming whites, the new victims.”⁹¹ “You have this perception out there that whites are no longer in control or the majority. Whites are the new minority group,” added Gallagher.⁹² Also, “a recent Public Religion Research Institute poll found 44% of Americans surveyed identify discrimination against whites as being just as big as bigotry aimed at blacks and other minorities.”⁹³ Additionally, Peter Brimelow argues that a majority of white anxiety could come from “living under a black president and changing demographics.”⁹⁴ He also adds that “Americans are trained to think that any explicit defense of white interests is 'racist.’”⁹⁵

But whether this idea is right or not cannot be simply said. Sometimes “whites” are considered as being discriminated against. And the same case of different views on this issue can also be seen in rap music. As stated by Kristen Porterfield in her thesis “A Critical Approach to Rap Music” written in 2007, society and the overall opinion about rap music could be divided into two camps. On the one hand, rap is seemed as a positive tool and that rap is “only perceived as violent due to a biased media.”⁹⁶ Porterfield argues that rap might be seen as a window to reality, what it truly means to be black and what the aspects of life on the streets are, and that many critics acclaim rap raising awareness of violence, brutality, death, and drugs in society. In addition, rap music is seen by many researchers as “an important means of education and a valuable tool for therapy.”⁹⁷ For instance, when rap was used in one of the therapies in which

⁸⁹ “Hang White People: French rap song suspended from YouTube,” BBC News, posted September 26, 2018, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-45657989>

⁹⁰ “Hang White People: Rapper Nick Conrad fined over YouTube song,” BBC News, posted March 19, 2019, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-47633459>

⁹¹ “Are whites racially oppressed?” CNN, posted March 4, 2011, http://edition.cnn.com/2010/US/12/21/white.persecution/index.html?fbclid=IwAR1I9oShUVpJlTa_7sc7bcC-466AIm1Sf_ugWQszmYy91Nsy18otvK708CU

⁹² CNN, “Are whites racially oppressed?”

⁹³ CNN, “Are whites racially oppressed?”

⁹⁴ CNN, “Are whites racially oppressed?”

⁹⁵ CNN, “Are whites racially oppressed?”

⁹⁶ Kristen Porterfield, “A Critical Approach to Rap Music,” (Unpublished A senior Thesis, Liberty University, 2017), 19.

⁹⁷ Porterfield, “A Critical Approach”, 21.

young people were afraid to express their feelings then rap music, being a more comfortable topic, helped the adolescents to share their opinions and ideas. Also, rap music served as a great helping tool not only in therapy sessions but also at schools. As stated by Porterfield, “many youths seem to be more comfortable discussing issues presented in rap music in place of discussing the same issues in their own lives.”⁹⁸

On the other hand, rap music is perceived as violent, misogynic, and inappropriate. For example, as stated in the article “Straight Outta Compton’s Censorship lesson,” Milt Ahlerich, a member of the FBI, sent a letter to Priority Records, who produced the debut album Straight Outta Compton by the rap group N.W.A., in which he stated that the song “Fuck tha Police” promotes violence against police forces.⁹⁹ Also, as stated on the server Rollingstones, MTV banned the album “Straight Outta Compton” in 1989. One of the group’s members MC Ren said: “It’s just a little sweep, no guns. MTV’s into all that crazy devil-worshipping shit... To me, there’s more violence on a motherfucking cartoon than in our music. Little kid see a cartoon character with a gun, he going to want to carry a gun, right?”¹⁰⁰ But despite these different views on rap music and whether it is appropriate to listen to or not, it is still one of the most dominant music genres there ever been and its popularity is still rising.

To conclude, even though racism was growing as time passed people still tried to fight against it. One of the possible “weapons” against this issue was hip hop and rap music, especially with the arrival of gangsta and political rap music. But this “weapon” can also be used in a negative way, as was described above. But since such a topic is very controversial and rap music regarding this theme is not an exception, it is a topic of many debates even today, which makes this music genre very popular.

5. N-Words

“Nigga” or “nigger,” also known as N-words, are words that could be easily be marked as one of the most racist terms one can use. But despite the fact that “the word nigger to colored people is like a red rag to a bull”, as stated by Randall L. Kennedy, it is used among them quite often and rap artists are not an exception.¹⁰¹ One of the examples of rap artists, who use these terms

⁹⁸ Porterfield, “A Critical Approach”, 21.

⁹⁹ “STRAIGHT OUTTA COMPTON’S CENSORSHIP LESSON,” National Coalition Against Censorship, Accessed November 10, 2021, <https://ncac.org/news/blog/straight-outta-comptons-censorship-lesson>

¹⁰⁰ “N.W.A’s ‘Straight Outta Compton’: 12 Things You Didn’t Know,” Rolling Stone, Accessed November 10, 2021, <https://www.rollingstone.com/feature/n-w-as-straight-outta-compton-12-things-you-didnt-know-707207/>

¹⁰¹ Randall L. Kennedy, “Who Can Say “Nigger”? And Other Considerations,” *The Journal of Blacks in Higher Education*, no. 26 (1999): 88, Accessed February 1, 2021, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/2999172?seq=1>.

in their music, could be the rap group N.W.A. which uses this expression in most of their songs. For instance, in the already mentioned song “Fuck tha police,” the term Nigga is used ten times throughout the song.¹⁰² But it might not be a surprise since even the rap group’s name N.W.A. stands for Niggaz Wit Attitudes.¹⁰³ Another example of a rap artist using this term might be Tupac Shakur. Even though in his song “Changes,” which is mentioned and analyzed above, the term nigga is used only once, there are other songs where the term is used more. For instance, “Ratha Be Ya Nigga” is a song in which the term nigga can be heard thirteen times.¹⁰⁴ However, as it is mentioned later, the most important aspect of these terms is their meanings. Just the fact that this word and other similar words are used in a song it does not necessarily mean that the song is racist. In the case of Tupac, the term Nigga might stand for “Never Ignorant About Getting Goals Accomplished,” which is described in the title of his another song called N.I.G.G.A., and this word is used roughly twenty-five times.¹⁰⁵ But despite this, where are the boundaries? In which cases do these terms seem to be racist and in which not? And if one knows the context and possible meaning of such terms used in the songs, one may ask whether it is still appropriate. And if not why are rap artists, mainly African-Americans, using the “N-words” in their songs very frequently?

Eazy E, a former member of the rap group N.W.A., in one of his interviews states that it all depends on the way these terms are used and pronounced. He explains: “Me goin’ what’s up nigga sounds totally different. When they go... somebody looking at you and go nigga then you’re gonna take it differently.”¹⁰⁶ In addition, in an interview by NBC, he adds that the terms niggas and niggers were not the choice of African American and that they were given these names.¹⁰⁷ Eazy E also adds “people been calling us niggers for years and so we carry that word. Right now the word is like saying homeboy.”¹⁰⁸ This statement could be also confirmed in a way among other rappers such as Snoop Dog, one of the most famous rappers of all time. When Snoop dog was asked about Eminem, probably the most famous white rapper, and his freestyle

¹⁰² N.W.A., “Fuck Tha Police.”

¹⁰³ Justin Kautz, “N.W.A.” *Encyclopedia Britannica*, posted May 3, 2018, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/NWA>,

¹⁰⁴ Deany Boii, “Tupac-I’d Rather Be Ya N.I.G.G.A.” posted December 7, 2007, YouTube video, 4:16, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yrWbzKu7ySU>.

¹⁰⁵ The Real G Music TV, “2Pac - N.I.G.G.A. (Never Ignorant Getting Goals Accomplished) (feat.Jadakiss),” posted December 5, 2015, YouTube video, 3:02, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=j9P_oLX3TFk

¹⁰⁶ RuthlessEazyE 5150, “Eazy-E - The N Word Rare Interview,” posted July 1, 2017, YouTube video, 2:42, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IaF6uF6ofWg>

¹⁰⁷ GoldenEraTV, “Rare Eazy-E Interview (NBC, 1993) - BG Knocc Out, Gangsta Dresta / Report on Gangsta Rap (2/2) [HQ],” posted April 6, 2010, YouTube video, 6:27,

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SezuXZGBDJ8>.

¹⁰⁸ GoldenEraTV, “Rare Eazy-E Interview.”

rap in Hip Hop awards he stated: “He’s a real nigga, that’s all I’m gonna say. He did what he was supposed to do. It feels good to have a white man to do it, to say what we’ve been wanting to say for a long time.”¹⁰⁹

It is obvious that these terms are accepted among African American people quite frequently but when it comes to white people and others the rules, under which they can or cannot use these terms, are not completely precise. John McWhorter, a professor from Columbia University, argues that “whites who ask ‘Why can’t we use it if they do?’ have always struck me as disingenuous. It isn’t rocket science to understand that words can have more than one meaning, and a sensible rule is that blacks can use the word but whites can’t.”¹¹⁰ However, McWhorter puts things into perspective of today’s society and its hypersensitivity. On one hand if “non-blacks”, as he refers to white people, would use this term in “a sympathetic and sensitive discussion” and he would be disturbed about it, it would make him seem, “in being so hypersensitive to injury so abstract, inferior indeed.”¹¹¹ On the other hand, however, he adds that “if nonblacks embrace this hypersensitivity as a way of showing that they are good people, they make me feel exploited.”¹¹² In addition, Wendy Kaminer, an author, lawyer, and civil libertarian states that “words are not incantations; they do not cast spells. They take their meaning and power from the contexts in which they appear.”¹¹³ This idea is also supported by another author Ta-Nehisi Coates. During one of the tours of his newly published book “We were eight years in power” Ta-Nehisi Coates got asked by an audience about usage the “N-words” as a white person. Coates answers that there are no words without context. It does not matter whether the words come from the African American community, from someone’s family or from a group of friends. The same words might have completely different meanings, which might not be fully understood without the context. He continues his answer with:

For white people, I think the experience of being a hip-hop fan and not being able to use the word “nigger” is actually very, very insightful. It will give you just a little peek into the world of what it means to be black. Because to be black is to walk through the world, and watch people doing things that you

¹⁰⁹ Black Hollywood Live, “Snoop Dogg Discusses Eminem & Has a Message For His Haters,” posted October 13, 2017, YouTube video, 1:49, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-DCPFW6s-nA>.

¹¹⁰ “The Idea That Whites Can’t Refer to the N-Word,” The Atlantic, last modified August 27, 2019, <https://www.theatlantic.com/ideas/archive/2019/08/whites-refer-to-the-n-word/596872/>.

¹¹¹ The Atlantic, “The Idea That Whites Can’t Refer to the N-Word.”

¹¹² The Atlantic, “The Idea That Whites Can’t Refer to the N-Word.”

¹¹³ “Can Educators Ever Teach the N-Word?,” The Atlantic, last modified February 21, 2012, <https://www.theatlantic.com/national/archive/2012/02/can-educators-ever-teach-the-n-word/253345/>

cannot do, that you cannot join in and do. So, I think there is actually a lot to be learned from refraining.¹¹⁴

This issue of white people using these terms is also described in a rap song called “I’m not racist” composed in 2017 by rapper Joyner Lucas.¹¹⁵ One of the most important aspects of the song is its video clip which, together with the song’s lyrics, simulates a dialogue between a white and a black person. Also, each verse starts with one of the protagonists saying some of his arguments and opinions on racism and the whole “white fighting African Americans” situation. In the first verse of the song, a white male protagonist says: “Call everybody, ‘Nigga,’ and get a nigga mad. As soon as I say, ‘Nigga,’ then everyone react. And wanna swing at me and call me racist 'cause I ain't black.”¹¹⁶ Lucas argues that even though the term is becoming more acceptable it is still not clear who should use it and if so on which conditions.¹¹⁷ The second protagonist of the song, a black male, responds in the second verse with: “That word was originated for you to keep us under. And when we use it, we know that's just how we greet each other. And when you use it, we know there's a double meaning under.”¹¹⁸ Yet again, the double meaning is mentioned here and it is probably the biggest sticking point of the whole situation around these terms. But the problem for some listeners of the song is the argumentation of both of the protagonists. As stated by Jared Chadwick in his essay:

This is a predominant issue with the lyrics as well, as both participants speak almost exclusively in ‘talking points,’ never stopping to elaborate on any particular issue. This gives each issue equal weight and importance, creating the illusion that arguments like ‘having black friends precludes me from being racist’ and ‘I fear for my life every time I see a police officer’ are equally valid and all arguments deserve equal attention.¹¹⁹

Chadwick also adds that another issue of the song is that it starts with the white person stating his problems and arguments and the African American is only reacting and responding. Joyner Lucas gave basically no space for the African American character to make his own statements and arguments and by doing so the whole song feels like it is centered only around the white

¹¹⁴ Random House, “Ta-Nehisi Coates on words that don't belong to everyone | We Were Eight Years In Power Book Tour,” posted November 7, 2017, YouTube video, 4:58, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QO15S3WC9pg>

¹¹⁵ Joyner Lucas, “I’m Not Racist,”

¹¹⁶ Joyner Lucas, “I’m Not Racist,”

¹¹⁷ “I’m not racist,” Genius, Accessed January 4, 2021, <https://genius.com/Joyner-lucas-im-not-racist-lyrics>.

¹¹⁸ Joyner Lucas, “I’m Not Racist,”

¹¹⁹ Jared Chadwick, “UNDERSTANDING EFFECTIVE SOCIAL JUSTICE PEDAGOGY,” May 2019, https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Jared-Chadwick/publication/332973748_UNDERSTANDING_EFFECTIVE_SOCIAL JUSTICE PEDAGOGY/links/5cd472d492851c4eab8f8321/UNDERSTANDING-EFFECTIVE-SOCIAL-JUSTICE-PEDAGOGY, 5.

participant of the dialogue.¹²⁰ Still, it is up to the listener to choose his “side” but from the point of view of the arguments and the whole antiracist message, it lacks more of the African American character’s participation.

To conclude, even though the expressions “nigga,” “nigger” or “negro” might be, in some cases, described as racist they are still widely used not only as a part of a greeting but also in the lyrics of rap songs and rap group names. The issue comes down to the meaning of such words, which is connected to the user and his usage these terms.

6. Crack Epidemic

Another big issue connected with black communities and African American citizens of the USA, in general, was the crack epidemic happening during the 1980s and 1990s. According to Mark H. Moore and Michael Tonry, the time of the 80s and 90s was a decade of a significant rise in overall youth violence and homicide.¹²¹ There are many hypotheses on what was the reason for this increase in crime. One of the assumptions is the crack epidemic which was also happening during this era. As reported by Constance Holder, this epidemic has appeared in 1985. As a result of the increase in Latin American cocaine production, the prices of each drug dropped significantly. Throughout urban America were reported many “copping corners”, places where many young people were buying drugs. Correspondingly to the rise of youth drug users rose the violence mentioned above.¹²²

Also, according to server Britannica, “crack cocaine first appeared in Miami, where Caribbean immigrants taught adolescents the technique of converting powdered cocaine into crack.”¹²³ This distribution of drugs soon after spread into other cities as well, including Los Angeles, New York City, Detroit, and others.¹²⁴ Also with the arrival of massive drug distribution raised the level of violence as well. As stated on server Britannica, “the emergence of crack cocaine in the inner cities led to a drastic increase in crime between 1981 and 1986.”¹²⁵ Also, violence led to many gang wars and battles on the streets. Gang members started to fight among others to control the drug trade. Cities such as Chicago, Los Angeles, Miami, and others

¹²⁰ Jared Chadwick, “UNDERSTANDING EFFECTIVE SOCIAL JUSTICE PEDAGOGY,” 6.

¹²¹ Mark H. Moore and Michael Tonry, “Youth Violence in America,” *Crime and Justice* 24, no. 1 (1998): 1-2.

¹²² Constance Holden, “Street-Wise Crack Research,” *Science, New series* 246, no. 4936 (December 1989): 1376.

¹²³ Deonna S. Turner, “Crack epidemic,” *Encyclopedia Britannica*, posted September 4, 2017, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/crack-epidemic>.

¹²⁴ Encyclopedia Britannica, “Crack epidemic.”

¹²⁵ Encyclopedia Britannica, “Crack epidemic.”

became “combat zones where drug-related killings among gangs are intended to prevent police detection of drug operations, eliminate competition, and enforce collection of debts,” as stated by Janice Joseph in the article *Black Youths and Illegal Drugs*.¹²⁶ However, it did not influence the general public and adult people, but also children and other members of communities. This issue can be heard in Tupac’s song “Changes” in the line “give the crack to the kids, who the hell cares? One less hungry mouth on the welfare,” which can be heard in the first verse of the song.¹²⁷ In addition, as stated by Aaron Navid Dahm in his thesis “I See No Changes”, “Tupac’s lyrics address the issue of poverty in ghettos and underline the vicious cycle of joblessness, crime, violence, and drug addiction that resulted directly from high rates of poverty.”¹²⁸ E. R. Oetting, Fred Beavals, and Ruth W. Edwards also add that, according to The American Alcohol and drug survey from 1988, there were only two schools out of twenty-four which did not have any seniors who had tried crack. “In other schools, from 2% to 5% of seniors (an average of 3.2%) had tried crack. Of the eight graders in these rural school systems, 1.6% had tried crack.”¹²⁹ Additionally, as stated in the article *Black Youths and Illegal Drugs* by Janice Joseph and Patricia G. Pearson, “the arrest data for 1994 indicated that 39% of those arrested for drug violations under the age of 18 were Blacks.”¹³⁰

“Fuck Tha Police” by N.W.A. has a similar line in its first verse stating: “Searchin' my car, lookin' for the product. Thinkin' every nigga is sellin' narcotics.”¹³¹ This belief that African Americans are using drugs more was mainly during the 1980s and 1990s very common among public and police officers. According to Janice Joseph and Patricia G. Pearson in their article *Black Youths and Illegal Drugs*, the number of drug users was higher among African Americans than among white people. The highest amount of African American drug users was recorded in 1985.

The number of arrests for Black youths rose from approximately 200 per 100,000 in 1985 to twice that amount 4 years later, whereas for White Youths declined. Black youths under the age of 18 had an arrest rate for a drug

¹²⁶ Janice Joseph, and Patricia G. Pearson, "Black Youths and Illegal Drugs," *Journal of Black Studies* 32, no. 4 (2002): 427-428, Accessed February 1, 2021, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3180884>.

¹²⁷ 2pac, “2Pac - Changes (Official Music Video) ft. Talent,”

¹²⁸ Aaron Navid Dahm, “I SEE NO CHANGES,” accessed February 1, 2021, http://thelionandthehunter.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/07/Dahm_Massincarceration_Tupac.pdf, 5.

¹²⁹ E.R. Oetting, Fred Beauvais, and Ruth W. Edwards, ""Crack": The Epidemic," *The School Counselor* 37, no. 2 (1989): 129-30, Accessed February 10, 2021, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/23901597>.

¹³⁰ Janice Joseph, "Black Youths and Illegal Drugs," 426.

¹³¹ N.W.A., “Fuck Tha Police.”

violation in 1994 of 483.9 per 100,000 persons, compared with 88.5 per 100,000 for White youth.¹³²

Another example of a song that covers this topic might be “I’m not racist” by Joyner Lucas. The first verse, which is rapped by a white person, contains lyrics that state: “for some weed and some liquor or a fuckin' babysitter?” or “And you'd rather sell drugs than get a job and be straight.”¹³³ The second protagonist responds in the second verse with: “Now I gotta sell drugs to put food in my cabinet.”¹³⁴ Joyner Lucas commented on these lyrics: “I’m speaking from somebody who grew up like me, where it was like I had to do all that shit. I had to sell drugs. I had to do this. I didn’t want it. It was like, I was going through everything the black cat was going through, and no jobs are calling back and there was all that.”¹³⁵ In addition, as stated by Steven Shulman in his book, the unemployment of African American people was approximately consistently twice higher than that of white people since 1954.¹³⁶ In other words, for many African Americans might be selling drugs as one of the few ways of earning money. And since this way of earning money was kind of profitable, as stated by the server Britannica, it led to further expansion of the “drug addiction.” The estimated income could be around two thousand dollars per month.¹³⁷

6.1. The war on drugs

The government of the USA tried to fix this situation during the 1970s by a campaign called “War on drugs.”¹³⁸ As stated on the server Britannica, “the War on Drugs began in June 1971 when U.S. Pres. Richard Nixon declared drug abuse to be “public enemy number one” and increased federal funding for drug-control agencies and drug-treatment efforts.”¹³⁹ However, the War on drugs was not very effective and it served only as a relatively small collection of federal laws. A significant change came in 1981 thanks to Ronald Reagan. “Reagan greatly expanded the reach of the drug war and his focus on criminal punishment over treatment led to a massive increase in incarcerations for nonviolent drug offenses, from 50,000 in 1980 to

¹³² Janice Joseph, "Black Youths and Illegal Drugs," 426.

¹³³ Joyner Lucas, “I’m Not Racist,”

¹³⁴ Joyner Lucas, “I’m Not Racist,”

¹³⁵ Genius, “I’m not racist,”

¹³⁶ Richard R. Cornwall, and Phanindra V. Wunnava, *New Approaches to Economic and Social Analyses of Discrimination* (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1991), 1, https://books.google.cz/books?hl=cs&lr=&id=a3m4FEAl03kC&oi=fnd&pg=PA5&dq=black+unemployment+rate+1980s&ots=tQt_Pje7ry&sig=_pI_FCgh0GF7xjuSzyHqeq8TjkM&redir_esc=y#v=onepage&q=black%20unemployment%20rate%201980s&f=false

¹³⁷ Encyclopedia Britannica, “Crack epidemic.”

¹³⁸ T. Editors of Encyclopaedia, "War on Drugs," Encyclopedia Britannica, July 23, 2020.

<https://www.britannica.com/topic/war-on-drugs>.

¹³⁹ Encyclopedia Britannica, “War on drugs.”

400,000 in 1997.”¹⁴⁰ This has led to several newly introduced decrees, including the Anti-Drug Abuse Act of 1986 on which the U.S. Congress agreed upon. This act allocated one billion and seven hundred thousand dollars to the War on drugs and also set a collection of “mandatory minimum prison sentences for various drug offenses.”¹⁴¹ The most notable aspect of this minimum was the big difference between the amount of crack and of powder of cocaine that resulted in the same punishment. “Possession of five grams of crack led to an automatic five-year sentence while it took the possession of 500 grams of powder cocaine to trigger that sentence.”¹⁴²

However, this seemingly positive approach was not without issues and complications. One of the biggest issues connected with this approach was the arrest rate and its irregularity. As stated by Jeff Yates and Andrew B. Whitford in their article *Race in the War on Drugs: The Social Consequences of Presidential Rhetoric*, “in 1999, African Americans represented roughly 12.8 percent of the nation's population but 35.2 percent of all drug offense arrests. In 2000, more African-American prisoners were incarcerated in the federal system for drug offenses than for all other offenses committed by African Americans combined.”¹⁴³ Besides, according to Deborah Small, “in some states the racial disparity in arrests and convictions for drug offenses is much worse. In seven states, Blacks constitute between 75 and 90 percent of all drug offenders sent to prison. In New York, over 94 percent of inmates incarcerated.”¹⁴⁴ Small also adds that this high number of arrests is not the only issue connected with this approach. People with drug convictions lost an opportunity to get federal financial support for education. In the two most populous states, New York and California, more of African Americans and Latino citizens were sent to prison each year than they graduate from universities and colleges. Additionally, when it comes to presidential elections, “an estimated 400,000 Black citizens of Florida were banned from voting because of a law enacted during reconstruction permanently disenfranchising people with felony convictions.”¹⁴⁵ And also, despite the fact that according to research which showed that alcohol and drug abuse rates were lower for pregnant black women than for pregnant white women, the probability that black

¹⁴⁰ Encyclopedia Britannica, “War on drugs.”

¹⁴¹ Encyclopedia Britannica, “War on drugs.”

¹⁴² Encyclopedia Britannica, “War on drugs.”

¹⁴³ Jeff Yates and Andrew B. Whitford, “Race in the War on Drugs: The Social Consequences of Presidential Rhetoric,” *Journal of Empirical Legal Studies* 6, no. 4 (2009): 893, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1740-1461.2009.01163.x>.

¹⁴⁴ Deborah Small, “The War on Drugs Is a War on Racial Justice,” *Social Research* 68, no. 3 (2001): 897. Accessed February 24, 2021, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/40971924>.

¹⁴⁵ Deborah Small, “The War on Drugs,” 898.

pregnant women were to be reported to authorities under mandatory reported laws was roughly 10 times bigger than with white pregnant women.¹⁴⁶ And with these possible “irregularities” came also an opinion that the War on drugs was founded on a rationale. And stated by Jeff Yates and his colleague, Kennedy argued that

[T]he war on drugs, although truly aimed against illicit narcotics, is conducted in a fashion that is negligently indifferent to the war's collateral damage to blacks . . . if the war on drugs did to white communities what it is doing to black communities, white policymakers would long ago have called a truce in order to pursue some other, less destructive course.¹⁴⁷

This topic is also covered in Tupac’s song “Changes.” This line states: “Instead of war on poverty. They got a war on drugs so the police can bother me.”¹⁴⁸ According to server Britannica, War on poverty was “expansive social welfare legislation introduced in the 1960s by the administration of U.S. Pres. Lyndon B. Johnson and intended to help end poverty in the United States.”¹⁴⁹ In addition, War on poverty, which is described by Erwina Godfrey, is another name for legislation that was introduced by a former president of the USA Lyndon Johnson 1964.¹⁵⁰ Lyndon Johnson in his speech tried to call on and persuade Congress to fix the poverty situation on the streets.¹⁵¹ Thanks to this legislation there was a rise “in per capita income among those participating in the program.”¹⁵²

7. Redefined concept of the black family as the racial community

Another common theme among rap songs is the concept of a black family as a racial community. As it was described above, Tupac’s songs are not the only place where he covered this topic. According to Stanford, his “Thug ideology” and “Code of Thug life”, which was a collection of rules under which gang members should live and which they should follow, were one of the most influential tools, and the “Thug life” is still commonly used among rap supporters even today. The rules are:

Slinging to children is against the Code. Having children slinging is against the Code. No slinging in schools. Crew leader and posse should select a diplomat, and should work ways to settle disputes. The Boys in Blue don't

¹⁴⁶ Deborah Small, “The War on Drugs,” 898.

¹⁴⁷ Jeff Yates and Andrew B. Whitford, “Race in the War on Drugs,” 893.

¹⁴⁸ 2pac, “2Pac - Changes (Official Music Video) ft. Talent,”

¹⁴⁹ A. Cooley, “War on Poverty,” Encyclopedia Britannica, February 18, 2020, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/War-on-Poverty>.

¹⁵⁰ Erwina Godfrey, “The War on Poverty,” *Journal of Thought* 1, no. 3 (1966): 5-6.

¹⁵¹ Txlihis, “LBJ State of Union War on Poverty,” posted October 19, 2008, YouTube video, 6:18, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qfT03Ihtlds>.

¹⁵² Godfrey, “The war on Poverty,” 7.

run nothing; we do. Control the Hood, and make it safe for squares. No slinging to pregnant sisters. That's baby killing; that's genocide. Civilians are not targets and should be spared. Our old folks must not be abused.¹⁵³

Tupac mentions this idea in few lines of his song “Changes”. “I got love for my brother. But we can never go nowhere unless we share with each other. We gotta start makin' changes. Learn to see me as a brother instead of two distant strangers. And that's how it's supposed to be. How can the Devil take a brother if he's close to me? Uh.”¹⁵⁴ Obviously, a brother, in this case, is not meant as a real, Tupac’s brother rather than a close friend. In other words, Tupac is trying to bring communities together as if all of the members were part of a family. Tupac is basically saying that communities should not fight against each other, but cooperate. Share things, ideas and help each other. According to Catherine Beighey, rappers made “imagined communities” in which they use these terms such as “brother” and “sister” which creates a sense of familiarity between members.¹⁵⁵ Beighey also adds that “although a member will never know every other member, the image of community is still evoked.”¹⁵⁶ In addition, the Devil in the final line might mean a lot of things. Since the main themes of the song are drugs, police brutality, and overall injustice against African Americans, the devil might stand for one of those, or possibly all those things. Another interpretation of this word may be “white people.” As stated by Dean E. Murphy, the term “white devil” was used by a Black Panther Party.¹⁵⁷ Also, the Black Panther Party is mentioned in many rap songs. Additionally, Afeni Shakur, Tupac’s mother, was an active member of this organization.¹⁵⁸

7.1. Black Panther Party

As stated by Duncan, Black Panther Party was an “African American revolutionary party, founded in 1966 in Oakland, California, by Huey P. Newton and Bobby Seale.”¹⁵⁹ The main purposes of this organization, which are stated in the book *Ethnics along the Color Line* by Ann Stubblefield, were to:

Advocate anti-colonial and anti-capitalistic black economic and political self-determination. They trained their members in armed self-defense, surveilled police who stopped black people to ensure that the officers read the detainees

¹⁵³ Stanford, "Keepin' It Real," 17.

¹⁵⁴ 2pac, “2Pac - Changes (Official Music Video) ft. Talent,”

¹⁵⁵ Beighey et al., "Political rap," 135.

¹⁵⁶ Beighey et al., "Political rap," 135.

¹⁵⁷ Dean E. Murphy, “Black Panthers, Gone Gray, Fight Rival Group,” *The New York times*, posted October 8, 2002, <https://www.nytimes.com/2002/10/08/us/black-panthers-gone-gray-fight-rival-group.html>

¹⁵⁸ Michael Ray, "Tupac Shakur," *Encyclopedia Britannica*, posted December 10, 2020, <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Tupac-Shakur>.

¹⁵⁹ Albert G. Duncan, "Black Panther Party," *Encyclopedia Britannica*, February 9, 2021, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Black-Panther-Party>.

their rights and did not commit undue violence against them and organized free clinics and breakfast programs for black children in working-class communities.¹⁶⁰

The initial program of this organization, which is described in the book *Seize the Time: The Story of the Black Panther Party and Huey P. Newton* written by Bobby Seale, was divided into several points, each focusing on a different issue. Some of the points are: “We want freedom. We want power to determine the destiny of our Black Community.”, “We want an immediate end to POLICE BRUTALITY and MURDER of black people.” Or also “We want freedom for all black men held in federal state, county and city prisons and jails.”¹⁶¹

Probably the most important and notable member of the Black Panther party was the co-founder Huey P. Newton.¹⁶² Newton was a respected man among other African-American people. As reported by Bobby Seale in his book which was already mentioned, he was admired for a lot of his abilities and qualities. For instance, even though he was an intelligent and educated person, he was not afraid of a man to man fight.¹⁶³ For example, one day Huey was buying a bottle of wine from the local shop when he was verbally attacked by another citizen from the same street and got into a fight which is still known as “one of the baddest fights that ever happened in West Oakland”.¹⁶⁴ But despite all of these mentioned qualities, the quality for which he was mainly respected was his awareness and wisdom in terms of the system and rights in which an American citizen had to live in. As Seale mentions, he was always known for being helpful and giving advice on almost every single issue a person could have. Also, along with this ability, he was able to fight against racism and for equal rights and freedom even before the Black Panther Party was formed.¹⁶⁵ This message, which he was trying to tell, is also the reason why he is mentioned in a lot of other rap songs. For instance, the rap group Public Enemy mentions his name in their song “Welcome to the Terrordome.”¹⁶⁶ Tupac himself also mentions his name in the song “Changes” in the line: “ ‘It's time to fight back,’ that's what Huey said. Two shots in the dark, now Huey's dead.”¹⁶⁷

¹⁶⁰ Anna Stubblefield, *Ethnics along the color line* (New York: Cornell university press, 2005), 60.

¹⁶¹ Bobby Seale, *Seize the Time: The Story of the Black Panther Party and Huey P. Newton*, (Baltimore: Black Classic Press, 1991), 66-68.

¹⁶² Seale. *Seize the Time*, 13.

¹⁶³ Seale. *Seize the Time*, 14.

¹⁶⁴ Seale. *Seize the Time*, 16.

¹⁶⁵ Seale. *Seize the Time*, 19.

¹⁶⁶ Jonjon2568, “Public Enemy – Welcome to the Terrordome,” posted February 13, 2013, YouTube video, 5:28, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=e4Zey7o04Qk>

¹⁶⁷ 2pac, “2Pac - Changes (Official Music Video) ft. Talent,”

7.2. Malcolm X

And these were not the only songs that used someone's name. Rap songs containing the name of someone influential and of someone who fought or still fights against racism are another approach of bringing black communities together. Another example might be Malcolm X who was mentioned in many different songs. For example, in the song called "Revolution" by a rap group Arrested Development, he is mentioned in this line: "my brother Malcolm X... Need I name more?"¹⁶⁸ Another line worth mentioning is: "My brother Malcolm X... Need I name more? It ain't like we never. Seen blood before."¹⁶⁹ Malcolm X was an "African American leader and prominent figure in the Nation of Islam who articulated concepts of race pride and black nationalism."¹⁷⁰ In 1962, Malcolm X gave one of the most famous speeches in which he addressed not only police brutality but also equal rights for black people and many more issues.¹⁷¹ Three years later, on February 21, 1965, Malcolm was assassinated by representatives of the Nation of Islam.¹⁷² And in addition, Black Nationalism was "a political and social movement" and its main goals were "sought to acquire economic power and to infuse among blacks a sense of community and group feeling."¹⁷³

His name was also mentioned in the song "Fight the power" by a rap group called Public enemy, which even today can be described as one of the most controversial songs and rap groups there ever was. In terms of the song, most of the lines serve just as a reference, either for other songs or for other artists, politicians, etc. For instance, in the line from the first verse: "Swinging while I'm singin'. Giving whatcha gettin',"¹⁷⁴ Public enemy is, similarly as the song "Revolution" by Arrested Development, referring to the part from one of Malcolm X's speeches in which he states: "Anytime you live in the twentieth century, 1964, and you walkin' around here singing 'We Shall Overcome,' the government has failed us. This is part of what's wrong with you do too much singing. Today it's time to stop singing and start swinging."¹⁷⁵ The next two verses are written in a similar pattern. There are many references and with their help, the

¹⁶⁸ Santeria of Central NY, "Arrested Development – Revolution," posted June 8, 2008, YouTube video, 4:27, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RWlvOolOic4>

¹⁶⁹ Santeria of Central NY, "Arrested Development – Revolution".

¹⁷⁰ L. A. Mamiya, "Malcolm X," *Encyclopedia Britannica*, October 22, 2020. <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Malcolm-X>.

¹⁷¹ Npatou, "Malcolm X's Legendary Speech: 'The Ballot or the Bullet' (annotations and subtitles)," posted June 6, 2017, YouTube video, 52:46, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6_uYWDyYNUg.

¹⁷² Mamiya, "Malcolm X,"

¹⁷³ "Black nationalism," *Encyclopædia Britannica*, last modified February 11, 2020, <https://www.britannica.com/event/black-nationalism>.

¹⁷⁴ JunkieDoe, "Public Enemy - Fight The Power," posted September 9, 2008, YouTube video, 5:20, <https://youtu.be/8PaoLy7PHwk>.

¹⁷⁵ Npatou, "Malcolm X's Legendary Speech,"

song tries to motivate people to change the attitude towards African Americans in case of human rights, racism, and how a government behaves towards the citizens and citizens of different races. However, the most important and probably the most famous part of this song is its “hook”, a small section between the verses. The hook is: “Fight the power. We've got to fight the powers that be.”¹⁷⁶ Especially the phrase “Fight the power” became very popular not only among other rap artists but also among many civil rights activists and many people around the world.¹⁷⁷

7.3.Connecting communities by Tupac’s songs

When it comes to rap music, to mention the name of someone significant who also stands up against racism was one of the ways how to bring communities together. While looking back to the song “Changes,” this idea of cooperating and staying together as one community or even family can also be heard later in the song. In one of the interludes, Tupac is saying: “We gotta make a change. It's time for us as a people to start makin' some changes. Let's change the way we eat. Let's change the way we live. And let's change the way we treat each other. You see, the old way wasn't workin'. So it's on us to do what we gotta do to survive.”¹⁷⁸ it is arguable whether by “we” Tupac means the whole African American community or people of all races. However, the change about which is Tupac rapping did not happen which can be heard in the next verse and in the chorus at the end of the song. In the third verse, Tupac is stating: “And still I see no changes, can't a brother get a little peace? It's war on the streets and the war in the Middle East.”¹⁷⁹ Yet again, Tupac is using the term “brother” and in addition, he is comparing two situations and areas of the USA which might seem to be different but they are in many ways similar. Tupac is mentioning the life on the street full of fights and gang wars and the Middle East where a “true” war is happening.¹⁸⁰ According to Eric V. Larson, Operation Desert Storm, also known as the Gulf War, was a name for the war happening in the Middle East in 1991. The main reason for this conflict was “to eject Iraqi forces from Kuwait.”¹⁸¹ However, similarly, as it was with the gang wars on the street, the US government was not concerned about the civilian casualties. And this led to several antiwar demonstrations happening not only

¹⁷⁶ JunkieDoe, “Public Enemy - Fight The Power,”

¹⁷⁷ “Fight the power: The most provocative song ever,” BBC, Accessed May 28, 2020, <https://www.bbc.com/culture/article/20190628-fight-the-power-the-most-provocative-song-ever>.

¹⁷⁸ 2pac, “2Pac - Changes (Official Music Video) ft. Talent,”

¹⁷⁹ 2pac, “2Pac - Changes (Official Music Video) ft. Talent,”

¹⁸⁰ 2pac, “2Pac - Changes (Official Music Video) ft. Talent,”

¹⁸¹ Eric V. Larson, and Bogdan Savych, *Misfortunes of War: Press and Public Reactions to Civilian Deaths in Wartime*, (Santa Monica, CA: RAND Project Air Force, 2007), 21.

in the USA but in Europe as well.¹⁸² Thus Tupac also tries to show how the authorities are paying more attention to wars outside of the USA and not to the issues on the streets in America.

Also, in the chorus at the end of the song a listener can hear: “That's just the way it is (The way it is, the way it is). Things'll never be the same (You're my brother, you're my sister). That's just the way it is, aww, yeah. Some things'll never change.”¹⁸³ Tupac is trying to point out that probably his fans, members of the African American community, or people in general are his brothers or sisters. He is trying to change the whole situation which was happening in the USA during the time when this song was composed, but at the end of the day, Tupac does not see a change, which is confirmed in the last sentence where he says that things will never change.¹⁸⁴ However, Tupac was aware that he might not be able to change the world. According to Alan Light, Tupac once said: “Every time I speak, I want the truth to come out. I'm not saying I'm gonna change the world, but I guarantee you that I will spark the brain that will change the world.”¹⁸⁵

7.4.A false way to gain fame

However, this community outreach with rap songs might not always be relevantly credible. There are many rap songs that target the audience with their lyrics about life on the street, police brutality, and many more themes which are related to the African American communities. But as stated by Errol A. Henderson in his article “Black Nationalism and Rap Music,” “many rappers are speaking a ‘reality’ that is not theirs - though it may be ‘real’ and prevalent to others - and is constantly exaggerated, glamorized, and hyped.”¹⁸⁶ This creates sort of a fake world in which fans of these rappers feel like they are part of someone's life that is simply said more difficult than others. For instance, as it was mentioned before in this paper, Joyner Lucas rapped about his experience of selling drugs because it was at the time the only way of earning money and staying alive.¹⁸⁷ But there are also rappers, who do not have any experience with such a life and are simply lying in their lyrics. According to Errol A. Henderson, one of the examples of such rappers could be a female rapper Lichelle Laws, who called herself “Boss.”¹⁸⁸ Even

¹⁸² Eric V. Larson, and Bogdan Savych, *Misfortunes of War*, 21.

¹⁸³ 2pac, “2Pac - Changes (Official Music Video) ft. Talent,”

¹⁸⁴ 2pac, “2Pac - Changes (Official Music Video) ft. Talent,”

¹⁸⁵ Alan Light, “Tupac Shakur Rapper. Actor. Activist. Thug. Poet. Rebel. Visionary.” The Rock Hall, accessed March 4, 2021, https://www.rockhall.com/sites/default/files/2019-11/Tupac_2017.pdf.

¹⁸⁶ Errol A. Henderson, "Black Nationalism and Rap Music," *Journal of Black Studies* 26, no. 3 (1996): 332, Accessed March 4, 2021, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2784825>.

¹⁸⁷ Genius, “I'm not racist,”

¹⁸⁸ Henderson, "Black Nationalism and Rap Music," 332.

though she grew up in a middle-class neighborhood in Detroit, her songs were full of “gangsta rap” and about violence and living on the streets.¹⁸⁹ A similar case is also described by Michael Quinn. In his article, Quinn claims that “rap entered the mainstream so quickly that its most commercially successful practitioners quickly lost credibility.”¹⁹⁰ This might be a similar case with “Boss”. It is arguable whether her songs should be treated as music which is describing issues related to African American communities or not.

Errol A. Henderson adds that this point is described by Karenga.¹⁹¹ His main point is that rappers do not, in many cases, describe what is “real” but instead they interpret their reality, which is, by the words of Karenga, “a responsibility beyond simply mirroring ‘reality’.”¹⁹² In this case, Karenga is commenting on the situation around Black communities and rappers with an analogy of “a drowning man who is shown a mirror.”¹⁹³ He claims that the person behind the mirror is showing the drowning man a reality and nothing else.¹⁹⁴ He also adds that “the person holding the mirror has a greater responsibility to the drowning man than that of “interpreting” his reality.”¹⁹⁵ In other words, the man holding the mirror has a different responsibility. He is simply responsible for the drowning man’s life and he should change this reality by giving him a stick or rope or find any other way of helping this man. “Rappers, who are making their pockets fatter helping themselves, are not, for the most part, transforming reality, or even understanding their responsibility to change it,” argues Karenga.¹⁹⁶ When it comes to the Black community, who is by Henderson in this case the drowning man, the change should not come from the mirror holders who are praising violence and disrespect women. He states that

The nihilism in much of rap only glamorizes further violence and sexism instead of a social practice of African-centered liberation to transform Black communities. This is the minimum requirement for would-be liberation, those who invoke images of Malcolm, the BPP, and King. This is far beyond the empty rhetoric of “by any means necessary.”¹⁹⁷

In addition, the rappers who might argue that by making music, in which they pretend to have a hard life, they get paid, and thus it makes it right Henderson argues that there are certain things

¹⁸⁹ Henderson, "Black Nationalism and Rap Music," 332.

¹⁹⁰ Quinn, "Never Shoulda Been Let out *Cultural*," 68.

¹⁹¹ Henderson, "Black Nationalism and Rap Music," 332.

¹⁹² Henderson, "Black Nationalism and Rap Music," 332.

¹⁹³ Henderson, "Black Nationalism and Rap Music," 332.

¹⁹⁴ Henderson, "Black Nationalism and Rap Music," 332.

¹⁹⁵ Henderson, "Black Nationalism and Rap Music," 332.

¹⁹⁶ Henderson, "Black Nationalism and Rap Music," 332.

¹⁹⁷ Henderson, "Black Nationalism and Rap Music," 332-333.

which people should not do just because of money. The boundaries might be thin but should not be neglected.¹⁹⁸ And as he states “rappers should be appreciated as entertainers but criticized as political leaders or spokespersons.”¹⁹⁹

Conclusion

Rap music is definitely an influential tool that can be used while talking about race, racism, and overall race differences. Throughout the years, rap became so popular that even today it could be talked about as one of the most influential music genres. It all comes to the artists and their behavior, including their way of writing the lyrics of rap songs.

This thesis at first introduced to the reader the main and most important eras of rap music. During these eras, rap music evolved not only in terms of its music but also in terms of the lyrics. Besides, rap music is divided into many sub-genres, along with the subgenres of “Gangsta” and “Political” rap. These two subgenres played an important role in terms of politics, race issues, and other controversial topics. Despite the fact that many of the songs are inappropriate, vulgar, or even contain violence, their themes were so arguable that they became a topic of many debates, which lead to an even bigger popularity of rap music.

There are many themes of rap songs, all of which were focused on a different topic. However, there were topics, which were more common in rap songs and which are the core of many songs. This thesis covered the themes of police brutality, race, racism, “N-words”, the Crack epidemic, and the concept of the Black family.

Mainly the police brutality was a popular theme for many rappers and their followers. As with all of these themes, this thesis described this issue using mainly three songs. “Fuck Tha Police” by a rap group N.W.A., “Changes” by rapper Tupac Shakur and “I’m not racist” by rapper Joyner Lucas. When it comes to the theme of police brutality, the best example might be the song “Fuck Tha Police.” N.W.A. describes issues connected to this theme. How might African Americans feel towards police officers and the rappers also picture how the situations in which are African Americans pulled over. Also, Joyner Lucas and Tupac Shakur cover this topic as well, but in a slightly different way. “Fuck Tha Police” is compared to the two mentioned songs more aggressive and violent.

¹⁹⁸ Henderson, "Black Nationalism and Rap Music," 333.

¹⁹⁹ Henderson, "Black Nationalism and Rap Music," 333.

Another topic, which is also covered in this thesis, is race and some of the expressions that are connected to it. The paper introduces what race is, what are the main definitions of race and what the authors say about this topic.

Connected to race is racism, which is a big issue that is still being discussed. This topic is mainly covered in the “Changes” and “I’m not racist” songs. Joyner Lucas tries in his song to simulate a conversation between two characters, a white and black person. Each side of this dialogue points out their arguments and comments on the situation between these two people of different races. Also, Joyner Lucas commented on some of the lines with his own experience and which is also included in this thesis. Tupac Shakur also covers this topic. But instead of pointing out issues of each “side,” he mainly encourages his fans and members of African American communities to cooperate and not fight against each other.

While talking about racism, it is important not to omit the so-called “N-words.” These expressions are used in many songs and by many people. But it might not be clear whether these terms are appropriate or not. This thesis described that these expressions have many different meanings and that the meaning might change while it is said by a white person and while by a black person. Also, these terms in African American communities are sometimes used as a sort of greeting and connection between the members.

Also, closely related to African American communities was the Crack epidemic, which happened in the United States. This issue affected mainly the African American citizens and it is also a topic of the songs “Changes” and “I’m not racist.”

In addition, when it comes to the black communities, encouraging people to help each other is another theme that is common for rap music and is also covered in this thesis. Additionally, Tupac Shakur was not only an influential person in terms of music but also outside of this art. Tupac was very active in his early years in school. He founded the rap group Outlawz and also the lifestyle of Thug life.

To conclude, rap played an important role not only in the world of music. It served as a tool for many different situations. Rappers used their song to picture their feelings, standpoints and also to pinpoint their lives and lives of African Americans to the public. With this genre of music, they also tried to change the overall situation which was, in many cases, hateful, racist, and violent against people of a different race. However, rap music was also used in a negative way. Just as music can be a positive mean of expressing your attitude, it might be the other way around. Many rap songs contain hateful lyrics and instead of connecting people, it encourages

them to fight against each other. Nevertheless, if used appropriately or not, rap music is still one of the most popular music genres and it should not be omitted.

Resumé

Tato bakalářská práce se zabývá tématem rasových rozdílů a jejich vyobrazením v textech rapové muziky. Cílem práce je definovat jak rapové písně vyobrazují rasismus, rasu a podobná témata a s jakými prostředky pracují v textech písní. Celá práce je rozdělena do několika částí, které na sebe vzájemně navazují. Každá taková část popisuje jiné téma a analyzuje vybrané písňové texty, na kterých vyobrazuje dané téma. V průběhu práce jsou primárně použity tři hlavní písně a to konkrétně „Changes“ od rappera Tupaca Shakura, dále „Fuck Tha Police“ od rapové skupiny N.W.A. a píseň „I'm not racist“ od rappera Joynera Lucase.

V první části tato práce popisuje hlavní éry ve vývoji rapové muziky a co je pro ně typické. Dále představuje některá významná jména z okruhu rapperů a jejich písně, které v jednotlivých érách byly populární. Dále je v této části uvedeno, co je to takzvaný „Gangsta“ a „Political“ rap a jakým způsobem jsou důležité tyto poddruhy rapu ve vývoji tohoto muzikálního žánru.

Další část této práce je zaměřena na téma policejní brutality a jejího vyobrazení v textech rapové muziky. V úvodu této části je uvedeno pár příkladů nekorektního jednání příslušníka policie vůči několika Afroameričanům. Dále je zde zmíněna část z Tupacovy písně, která se dotýká tohoto tématu. Dále je stručně nastíněn politický život rappera Tupaca a s jeho pomocí lze lépe pochopit text nejen samotné Tupacovy písně, ale také celkové době, ve které byla píseň „Changes“ napsána. Tupac svůj život kromě své hudební tvorby věnoval i aktivitám, kterými se snažil zabránit rasistickému a protiprávnímu jednání, které bylo činěno na jeho osobě a také na ostatních příslušnících černošské rasy. Výrazně ovlivnil celou hudební scénu rapu a jejich fanoušků. Dále jsou v této části i rozebrány texty písní „I'm not racist“ a „Fuck Tha Police“, které se také dotýkají tématu policejní brutality. Především píseň „Fuck Tha Police“ je známá touto tematikou. Píseň je napsána v útočném a agresivním stylu.

Práce dále navazuje na předešlé téma s částí, která se zabývá rasou. V této části je popsáno, co taková rasa je, jaké jsou její definice a co se rozumí tímto pojmem. Dále jsou zde uvedeny některé pojmy, které jsou spojené s rasou jako takovou a jsou rozebrány z etického pohledu. Tato část je poté zakončena se stručným nastíněním tématu otrokářství, které je zmíněno v textu písně „I'm not racist“ a jejíž autor Joyner Lucas se i na toto téma osobně vyjádřil. Je zde uveden i jeho komentář ke konkrétním částem této písně, kde popisuje jednak svoje zkušenosti spjaté s jeho příbuznými, kteří zažili otrokářství a také ty zkušenosti, které jsou spjaté s jeho osobou a zkušenostmi z jeho života.

V další části této práce je rozebráno téma rasismu. Nejprve je představeno, co to rasismus je a jaké jsou jeho definice. I přesto, že je rapová muzika občas označována jako nenávistná a rasistická, tak je naopak v mnoha případech používána jako jeden z možných nástrojů pro psychickou hygienu. Je zde popsáno, jak může být muzika využita při boji proti rasismu a také jaké jsou důvody pro černošské a bělošské mladé lidi pro poslech této muziky a jak se mezi sebou liší s ohledem na odlišnou rasu. Navzdory tomu, že drtivá většina písňových textů se zabývá rasismem vůči černošským skupinám, existují některé rapové písně, které jsou rasistické vůči bělochům. Jsou zde uvedeny některé příklady takových písní a jsou zde stručně rozebrány některé jejich části.

Dalším důležitým tématem této práce jsou takzvané „N-Words“, neboli výrazy označující například osoby Afroamerické rasy. Problematika užití těchto slov je nastíněna v této části, která vysvětluje, za jakých situací a okolností jsou tyto výrazy považovány za rasistické a také které osoby či příslušníci ras mohou tyto pojmy používat. Jsou zde uvedeny i výroky některých rapperů, ve kterém vysvětlují použití a význam těchto slov.

Další téma, které je rozebráno v této práci, je takzvaná Epidemie cracku, která se v minulosti uskutečnila ve Spojených Státech Amerických. Epidemie cracku je pojem označující období, během kterého se ve Spojených Státech Amerických rapidně rozšířila konzumace a distribuce drog. Na začátku této části je stručně uvedeno, co konkrétně se událo během těchto dob a jaké byly následky této Epidemie. Jsou zde také uvedeny úryvky ze všech tří písní, které jsou zmíněny výše, a které rozebírají tuto problematiku. Tato část dále pokračuje s popisem kampaně nazvané „Válka proti drogám“, což byla reakce tehdejší vlády Spojených států Amerických na tuto situaci. Opět je zde uvedena část písně „I'm not racist, která zmiňuje tuto kampaň a reakci vlády.

Závěrečná část této práce je věnována konceptu černošské rodiny, který se často vyskytuje v rapových písních. Jsou zde uvedeny postupy či způsoby, kterými se rapeři snaží spojit několik komunit dohromady a vytvořit tak pomyslnou „rodinu“. Jedním z možných způsobů je zmínění jmen vlivných lidí bojující proti rasismu. Jednou takovou osobou byl například Malcolm X, který je také zmíněn v několika textech různých rapových písní. Dále je zde uvedena takzvaná „Black Panther Party“, což bylo hnutí, které bojovalo proti rasismu. I toto hnutí je předmětem několika rapových písní. Také je zde pospáno, jakým způsobem spojoval jednotlivé komunity dohromady Tupac Shakur. Píseň „Changes“ obsahuje části, které jsou spjaté s touto myšlenkou a právě tyto části jsou zde i dále rozebrány. V neposlední řadě je zde zmíněn případ

ženské raperky, která „spojuje“ své fanoušky falešnými texty, ve kterých lživě popisuje svůj život. Jedná se o další možný způsob, kterým lze získat slávu na rapové scéně.

Rapová muzika je mnohdy označována za vulgární, agresivní a nenávistný žánrem. Mnoho autorů odborných článků zavrhuje tuto rapovou muziku a označuje jí jako irelevantní. Rapové písně mohou být v mnoha ohledech skutečně nevhodné pro většinu posluchačů. Texty těchto písní jsou v některých případech opravdu velmi vulgární, agresivní a nenávistné vůči určitým osobám či skupinám, jako jsou například příslušníci policie. Rapová muzika ale může být i pravým opakem. Jak bylo uvedeno v některých částí této práce, rapové písně pomáhají mladým lidem vyrovnat se se skutečným světem a nabízejí jim dveře do toho druhého světa, světa muziky. Ne všichni rapeři píší své písně pouze za účelem výdělků či vidinou slávy a také jsou mnohdy viděni v očích společnosti jako něco víc než „pouzí“ umělci. Ať už je ale rap vulgární nebo ne, agresivní či nikoliv anebo ať je nenávistný vůči ostatním nebo naopak podporující a spojující, je to stále významný žánr muziky, který pohltil celý svět. Rap se stále vyvíjí, přibývá čím dál více jeho následovníků a stává se více a více populárním. Rapová muzika zkrátka nejen formuje svět muziky, ale svými texty i okolní svět, protože díky mnoha textům lidé začali debatovat o různých problémech ať už v pozitivním či negativním smyslu a pouhá komunikace je mnohdy klíčem k řešení spousty problémů.

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