

UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN-EAU CLAIRE

**Bebop and Hip-Hop:
A Response to Racism**

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Abstract

In the 1940's bebop grew to be the most popular jazz subgenre. It was created in Harlem but gained popular among the mainstream on 52nd Street in New York City. Musicians such as Dizzy Gillespie and Miles Davis were among the most popular beboppers during this time. There was much racial tension surrounding bebop, which led to bebop being a rebellious genre of music that fought racism and brought down racial barriers. Similar to bebop, hip-hop was a rebellious genre of music that fought racism in an aggressively expressive manner. Hip-hop grew out of the cultural diversity, social instability, economic disparity, and divisions in the U.S, during the 1970's. Hip-hop opposed racism in a more radical and extreme way compared to bebop; artists such as KRS One, N.W.A, and Public Enemy are examples of hip-hop artists who did this. In the end both were able to break down racial barriers and bring black and white audiences together, while providing a voice for the black community. This paper contains some strong language.

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Part I: Introduction

Music can be a very personal asset to someone as it can represent emotions, opinion, cultures, politics, societies, communities; music essentially is an identity. Music has held an identity in the African-American community since the time of slavery, when different kinds of drum beats and rhythms were brought to the United States from Africa. Today we have hip-hop and jazz, two genres of music that have direct lineage to those drum beats and rhythms. Because music holds an identity for communities and individuals, the importance of music cannot be ignored. Music has a voice and over the course of the 20th century music has found and used its voice in issues of race.

Bebop, a sub genre of jazz, and hip-hop are two examples of types of music that carried a voice and a generation against issues of race, and spoke for this generation. When looking at the history of both bebop and hip-hop it is clear that issues of race played a role. When looking at bebop the artists themselves faced racism everyday on a personal level and a business level, while hip-hop artists used their music to make statements about racism in the United States, and were influenced by the Civil Rights Movement as the genre was trying to climb out of the shadow of that era. Bebop has had a direct influence on the roots of hip-hop and both hip-hop and bebop have faced adversity and resistance from a racial point of view because both genres of music come from the African American community during a time of racism in the United States.

Comparing the two genres, bebop has taken a passive aggressive stance towards racism and issues of race during its golden era, but hip-hop, on the other

hand, took a more aggressively expressive stance towards racism during its era. The difference between the two is that bebop experienced racism that was directed towards it as a musical genre, whereas hip-hop was a response to racism. However both were responsible for racial boundaries being crossed to a certain extent.

This will be shown in this paper by various pieces of evidence. First the history of bebop and its social context will be discussed. This section will outline the history and growth of bebop and identify two key players of the bebop genre, Miles Davis and Dizzy Gillespie. The paper will then look at instances of racism that both Davis and Gillespie faced and examine how they responded to these situations, and in turn examine how bebop responded to this situation. This will show how and why bebop responded in a more passive aggressive and subdued manner. Next the history of hip-hop and the social context will be discussed. This will be done by outlining, as was done for bebop, its history and identifying three hip-hop artists who have made statements about race issues in their lyrics. These artists will be N.W.A, KRS One and Public Enemy. This paper will look at a song written by each of these artists and identify areas which show how hip-hop combated racism in a aggressively expressive way than did bebop. A comparison of the two genres will then be made, contrasting the similarities and differences between the social context that both genres lived through, the way that both combated racism, and how they influenced each other.

This paper will provide a different point of view of the affects of bebop and hip-hop on racism as it will compare the two genres affect and response on racism. A comparison like this has not been done in depth.

Part II: Bebop

Section A: History and Social Context of Bebop

The roots of the birth of jazz can be found in New Orleans in the 19th century. It is generally agreed that the mix of European and African culture contributed the genre of music that we now call jazz. Accounts of African dances, performed by slaves, in Congo Square, now known as Louis Armstrong Park, date back to 1819.¹ These dances and music contained various drum beats and rhythms as well as singing that seemed to be improvised, but at the same time was extremely well choreographed.² Out of this grew the extremely diverse and still growing genre of jazz.

There are countless subgenres of jazz, from acid jazz to jazz blues and cool jazz to punk jazz but bebop may be the one subgenre with the two most influential jazz artists in its genre, Dizzy Gillespie and Miles Davis. We will get to these two later.

The growth of bebop can be dated back to Swing in the late 1930's, another subgenre of jazz. Swing enabled artists to experiment more with solos which favored jazz artists as soloing was extremely similar to the jam sessions that jazz artists took part in. Most artists saw the jam session as the purist way to express themselves musically.³

However a recording ban that took place in 1942, put in place by the American Federation of Musicians, and the declining popularity of Swing among

¹ Ted Gioia, "Prehistory of Jazz," in *The History of Jazz* (London, UK: Oxford University Press, 1997), 3

² Ibid, 4

³ Scott DeVeaux, *The Birth of Bebop* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1997), 276.

the public, especially performances by black orchestras, made the professional life of jazz artists a struggle. Previous to the ban black jazz artists already struggled to make live bookings and money was sometimes difficult to come by for reasons such as poor working conditions, long and sometimes endless travel, racially motivated condescension, and the threat of violence were a couple of those reasons to name a few.⁴

Jazz artists started to express themselves in the only and the best way that they knew they could due to the ban; they started to take part in jam sessions.

These jam sessions largely took place in New York City because all the big jazz musicians, or anybody who wanted to be somebody, came there to play on

52nd Street. 52nd Street was the largest strip with clubs and speakeasies for jazz musicians to play in.⁵ Out of these jam sessions artists started playing more freely and started to experiment more. Playing on 52nd Street was an uneasy thing to do for many artists, though, because it was in the middle of midtown which was a predominantly white neighborhood.

Previous to the 1940's, 52nd Street was called 'Swing Street,' however it was not a friendly place for black musicians. Billie Holiday famously called 52nd



**Figure 1: 52nd Street circa 1948 –
by William Gottlieb**

William Gottlieb, *52nd Street, New York, N.Y., ca. July 1948*, photograph, American Memory, Collection of William Gottlieb, Library of Congress Prints & Photographs Division Washington D.C.

⁴ DeVeaux, *The Birth of Bebop*, 273.

⁵ *Ibid*, 284

Street a 'Plantation'.⁶ Holiday complained that although 52nd Street was called 'Swing Street' there were only two black artists that were allowed to play music there, she and Ted Wilson.⁷ Although speakeasies on 52nd Street hired black jazz artists to play, they clubs would exclude black customers, something that annoyed black jazz artists according to Leonard Feather, a white bebop critique, who said, "The clubs could not exclude black musicians with whom they were familiar. But by and large, they tried to keep as white as possible."⁸ The fact that black musicians were allowed to play in these clubs during the forties might show signs of racial harmony in this area. But there were still instances of violence and harassment by white servicemen towards black musicians due to the mere presence of black musicians on the street.⁹ This did cause some unharmonious times on 52nd Street.

The fact of the matter, though, is that 52nd Street was the place to be for jazz musicians because it was the one place where they could truly express their music to a large audience every night. 52nd Street was also one of the few places musicians could go and play and make a living doing that.¹⁰ This was a considerable accomplishment considering the discrimination towards black musicians and the ban on recording. It was a great area for jazz artists to grow and gain recognition and became a gathering place for young jazz artists. One of these artists was Dizzy Gillespie.

⁶ DeVeaux, *The Birth of Bebop*, 286

⁷ Billie Holiday and William Dufty, *Lady Sings the Blues* (New York, NY: Penguin Books, 1984), 97.

⁸ DeVeaux, *The Birth of Bebop*, 286

⁹ *Ibid*, 286

¹⁰ *Ibid*, 287

According to Gillespie he came and stayed on 52nd Street because it provided him with a huge audience which he and his group could play to and show them their music. His group initially consisted of Max Roach on the drums, Oscar Pettiford on the bass and George Wallington on piano. This is widely recognized, and openly stated by Gillespie, as the first bebop band. They first showcased their music at the Onyx on 52nd Street on October 20th, 1943.¹¹

However Bebop did not originate in the clubs of 52nd Street. According to Miles Davis, a Jazz legend, bebop originated in Minton's Playhouse, a predominantly black club located in Harlem.¹² Minton's Playhouse was the place jazz artists went to gain a reputation and to better the skills by learning from each other. It was a competitive place where artists played to show each other their skills. Davis

describes Minton's as the place as the 'musical laboratory for bebop'. Davis claims that, "After it (bebop) polished up at Minton's, *then* it went downtown to 52nd Street – the Three Deuces, the Onyx, and Kelly's Stable – where white people heard it."¹³

The owner of the Minton's Playhouse, Teddy Hill, bred this competitiveness in his club and encouraged that kind of culture. According to



Figure 2: Portrait of Thelonious Monk, Howard McGhee, Roy Eldridge, and Teddy Hill, Minton's Playhouse, New York, N.Y., ca. Sept. 1947 – by William Gottlieb

William Gottlieb, *Portrait of Thelonious Monk, Howard McGhee, Roy Eldridge, and Teddy Hill, Minton's Playhouse, New York, N.Y., ca. Sept. 1947*, photograph, American Memory, Collection of William Gottlieb, Library of Congress Music Division Washington D.C.

¹¹ Dizzy Gillespie and Al Fraser, *To Be or Not to Bop* (New York, NY: Da Capo, 1979), 202.

¹² Miles Davis and Quincy Troupe, *Miles* (New York, NY: Touchstone, 1989), 53.

¹³ *Ibid*, 54.

Davis, “Minton kicked a lot of motherfuckers’ asses, did them in, and they just disappeared – not to be heard from again. But it also taught a whole lot musicians, made them what they eventually became.”¹⁴

The origin of the word ‘bebop’ is best explained by Budd Johnson, who worked extensively with Dizzy Gillespie. The word bebop came from Gillespie trying to explain the way he wanted the music to sound in his head. Johnson said, “Dizzy would be trying to explain something or show you how to play it, he would hum it to you. And he would say, ‘No, no, it goes likes this – ump-de-be-de-bop-be-bop-be-doo-dop-de-de-bop’.”¹⁵ What Johnson explained above came to be called scatting which is a key component of bebop; because Gillespie coined this concept he is considered one of the original bebop artists.¹⁶

Miles Davis described bebop as a genre that came directly out of the black community. He makes a comparison between the white community in the 1940’s and the black community and explained that bebop was something for the black community and came out of the black community. Davis said that in the 1940’s the white community enjoyed music they could understand and music ‘they could *hear* without straining.’ This may be why swing was so popular in the white community, because it was something they could dance to. According to Davis bebop was significant because it held cultural importance and belonged to the black community.¹⁷

¹⁴ Davis and Troupe, *Miles*, 54.

¹⁵ Gillespie, *To Be or Not to Bop*, 222

¹⁶ Deveaux, *The Birth of Bebop*, 293

¹⁷ Davis and Troupe, *Miles*, 119.

Section B: Dizzy Gillespie and Racism in Bebop

Dizzy Gillespie was born in South Carolina in a town called Cheraw, on October 21, 1917. His full name was John Birks Gillespie and Dizzy was his nickname.¹⁸ As mentioned above Dizzy Gillespie was one of the pioneers of bebop; he played the trumpet which can be seen in Figure 3 below. He was one of the most influential Bebop artists who played in Minton's Playhouse as well as on 52nd Street where bebop gained its commercial success and exposure to a mainstream audience and a predominantly white crowd. Like every black man in the United States during bebop's era, Gillespie was exposed to and experienced racism on a personal level, but he also experienced it playing bebop.

Gillespie experienced false press about bebop and its style and influence that it had on youth. This bad press was generally generated out of racist and discriminatory opinions, he believed. An article in *Time* magazine in 1946, which identified Gillespie as one of the key players of bebop, discussed a ban on bebop that a radio station in Los Angeles imposed. The radio station claimed that bebop had a 'degenerative influence on youth' and claimed that, "bebop amounts to: hot jazz, overheated, with overdone lyrics full of



Figure 3: Portrait of Dizzy Gillespie, New York, N.Y., ca. May 1947 - by William Gottlieb

William Gottlieb, *Portrait of Dizzy Gillespie, New York, N.Y., ca. May 1947*, photograph, American Memory, Collection of William Gottlieb, Library of Congress Prints & Photographs Division Washington D.C.

¹⁸ "Biography," The Dizzy Gillespie All-Stars, accessed November 17, 2012, <http://dizzygillespie.org/dizzy.html>.

bawdiness, references to narcotics and doubletalk.”¹⁹ The radio station also claimed that beboppers wore ‘wild clothes and glasses at night’²⁰.

These things were not necessarily true of bebop and beboppers. The comment on clothing was invalid as this was the style in the 1940’s and a lot of people wore clothing like that, not only beboppers, according to Gillespie.²¹

The radio program discussed the way beboppers spoke in slang and tried to ‘talk like Negroes,’ which is only slightly true except that most of what was considered slang was actually pig Latin, and was used to prevent children from understanding adult conversation, according to Gillespie. This dated back to the 19th century.²²

The article also talked about drug use among beboppers and talk of drug use in their lyrics. This is not necessarily a lie as most beboppers smoked marijuana, although they would tell you that that was not a drug problem, according to Gillespie.²³ Later on in the bebop era heroin became a serious issue amongst some bebop artists, but drug use was not something that was specific to bebop artist or the black community, there were plenty of people in the white community doing the same, according to Gillespie. The difference was that because bebop was a form of black art and culture, the bad press on drugs would focus on bebop rather than a broad scale look of the issue of drugs.

¹⁹ Gillespie, *To Be or Not to Bop*, 278-279

²⁰ *Ibid*, 279

²¹ *Ibid*, 279

²² *Ibid*, 280

²³ *Ibid*, 283

Essentially bebop was an easy scapegoat for blame for people's drug habits, according to Gillespie.²⁴

Another area of bebop that the radio program discussed was the allegation it was unpatriotic and had a poor attitude towards segregation, economic disparity, and the American way of living. Gillespie explained this attack on bebop by essentially agreeing with this statement explaining:

Damn right! We refused to accept racism, poverty, or economic exploitation, nor would we live out uncreative humdrum lives merely for the sake of survival. But there was nothing unpatriotic about it. If America wouldn't honor its Constitution and respect us as men, we couldn't give a shit about the American way.²⁵

Gillespie argued that bebop was a response to the racism that was not only being thrown at bebop but at the black community in America at the time. He was saying that yes, bebop is a response to racism, but not in a way that is directly in the faces of white America. Gillespie again showed that when he states, "For a generation of Americans and young people around the world, who reached maturity during the 1940's, bebop symbolized a rebellion against the rigidities of the old order, an outcry for change in almost every field, especially in music. The bopper wanted to impress the world with a new stamp, the uniquely modern design of a new generation coming of age."²⁶

Dizzy Gillespie was affected by racism on a personal level as well. In his memoirs he discusses his first real experience and memory with racism; it was a moment that made him realize the existence of a divide between the white community and the black community. At a young age Gillespie was friends with a

²⁴ Gillespie, *To Be or Not to Bop*, 284

²⁵ *Ibid*, 287

²⁶ *Ibid*, 302

boy named John who was around the same age as him. Gillespie's mother did washing for John's family and while she was doing this Gillespie and John would play in the yard. At the age of seven or eight Gillespie was told by his mother that he was not allowed to play with John anymore and there was an agreement between John and Gillespie's families that they wouldn't be friends anymore.

Gillespie describes this experience as followed:

The color situation never arises at that age; but the moment you hit eleven or twelve, you become aware of other things. My mama called me in the house one day and said, 'Look, you gotta stop playing with that little white boy.' I said, 'Huh?' But there was a tacit agreement between my mother and the Malloy's that we wouldn't be tight no more. I was shocked. We were both shocked. And mad. But after that we didn't play together anymore.²⁷

Later on in life Gillespie and John had a reunion of some sorts while Gillespie had a show and John came and found him backstage and re-introduced himself.²⁸

There were other instances in Gillespie's life where he was directly exposed to racism. When he was seventeen he was in a band and their trombone player, Bill McNeil, disappeared. A rumor spread around town that McNeil had been taken by a group of white men who accused him of being a 'peeping tom'. Apparently they tied him up on a railroad track, although a body was never found.²⁹

Another example of racism in Gillespie's life occurred in St. Louis when the band he was in was fired from a steady gig that they had at an all-white club. The owner didn't like the band coming in through the front door and one day they

²⁷ Gillespie, *To Be or Not to Bop*, 17

²⁸ *Ibid*, 17

²⁹ *Ibid*, 30

came in with their instruments and all their equipment through the front door. They were fired on the spot.³⁰

Such things were common in Gillespie's life as it was for anyone in the black community. It was a part of life that Gillespie had to face and was something that he had no issue with writing about in his memoir and was very open about; he even discussed it with a hint of cynicism.

Dizzy did not only experience negativity towards bebop around the country from the white community, there were also many moments of great support showed to bebop. Gillespie discussed that a lot of the negativity and bad press directed towards bebop represented a small amount of people and that in fact both white and black people enjoyed and shared the music together.³¹

Gillespie toured in California and his concerts broke attendance records at Cricket's Club in Los Angeles.³² Thousands of people went to each of his concerts during this eight week tour of California and not only the black community attended by the white community as well.

Gillespie described what he saw and what it meant for bebop as follows, "These were black and white people alike, by the tens of thousands, willing to stand up and testify for bebop."³³ This clearly shows the effects that bebop had in America in the 1940's and shows that it was an art that brought the country together and allowed people to forget about Jim Crow laws in America and the segregation and economic disparity that the black community faced daily.

³⁰ Gillespie, *To Be or Not to Bop*, 188

³¹ *Ibid*, 342

³² *Ibid*, 342

³³ *Ibid*, 342

Bebop allowed artists such as Dizzy Gillespie to make statements and expressions about racism without directly saying anything; the action was enough. Dizzy Gillespie shows that bebop did this exact thing and was able to bring people of different races together.

Section C: Miles Davis and Racism in Bebop

Miles Davis was born in Alton, Illinois and raised in East St. Louis. At the age of thirteen he was given a trumpet. His talent showed and was considered a prodigy in early life. In 1944 Davis was accepted to the Julliard music school in New York City. But to Davis this was a chance to break through and meet the Jazz musicians on 52nd Street, like Dizzy Gillespie. Davis may not have been one of the pioneers and founders of bebop but he was able to master it and his talents showed on 52nd Street and in Minton's Playhouse during the latter half of the 1940's. Davis' influence on bebop lay within him evolving and expanding bebop, changing it and forcing it to grow. Davis is considered one of the great beboppers because of this.³⁴

Compared to Gillespie, Miles was less complementary of 52nd Street and viewed it as a place to make money because this was where the white audience was, rather than the place to musically express oneself. Davis also believed that 52nd Street was a haven for racist attitudes towards black jazz musicians as the white community tried to steal bebop from black musicians to claim it as there's, long after bebop became a hit at Minton's Playhouse. Davis expressed this in his

³⁴ "Biography," Miles Davis, accessed November 12, 2012, <http://www.milesdavis.com/us/biography>.

memoirs, “After bebop became the rage, white music critics tried to act like they discovered it – and us – down on 52nd Street. That kind of dishonest shit makes me sick to my stomach. And when you speak out on it or don’t go along with this racist bullshit, then you become a radical, a black troublemaker.”³⁵ This clearly shows Davis being affected by racism in bebop, as he felt that it was trying to be taken away from him, and he saw this as racist.

Davis also discussed how bebop made the white community uncomfortable because, it was the only place they could see bebop, they believed bebop was invading 52nd Street. Miles claimed that this made the white community nervous, “A lot of white people, though didn’t like what was going on on 52nd Street. They didn’t understand what was happening with the music. They thought that they were being invaded by niggers from Harlem, so there was a lot of racial tension around bebop.”³⁶ Davis goes on about how a lot of black men started dating white women and were bringing them to 52nd Street which made white people extremely uncomfortable, especially white men. All of this, according to Davis, led to a lot of racial tension regarding bebop.³⁷



Figure 4: Portrait of Howard McGhee and Miles Davis (bottom left), New York, N.Y., ca. Sept. 1947 - by William Gottlieb

William Gottlieb, *Portrait of Howard McGhee and Miles Davis, New York, N.Y., ca. Sept. 1947*, photograph, American Memory, Collection of William Gottlieb, Library of Congress Music Division Washington D.C.

³⁵ Davis and Troupe, *Miles*, 55

³⁶ *Ibid*, 67

³⁷ *Ibid*, 67

The language in reference to the musicians on 52nd Street contained a lot of racial slurs by the white audience as well, which contributed to the racial tensions surrounding bebop. Davis recalled an evening where comedian Milton Berle, called Davis and his band 'savages' to a group of white men sitting at the table behind him. Davis did not take too kindly to this and remembered the comment his whole life. One day Davis saw Berle on an airplane and was able to speak his mind and remind Berle about that event:

"Milton, you did something to me and some people in the band I was playing with some years ago that I've always remembered, and I always told myself that if I ever got close enough to breathe on you that I was gonna tell you the way I felt when you said what you said that night. I don't like what you called us that Milton, and none of the band liked it either after I told them what you said."³⁸

According to Davis, Berle was extremely apologetic and apologized profoundly, but Miles reminded him, "I know you are. But you're only sorry now, sorry after I told you, because you weren't sorry then."³⁹ This shows the racist culture and opinions that were expressed towards beboppers and bebop and the forum that the genre was played. It shows how racism surrounded bebop and how therefore bebop was profoundly affected by racism.

Miles also discussed how he was personally exposed to racism and claims that this was something that the black community had to deal with everyday. He said, "The police fuck with me by stopping me all the time. This kind of shit happens to black people every day in this country. It's like what Richard Pryor said, 'When you're black and you hear a white man go "Yah hoo,"'

³⁸ Davis and Troupe, *Miles*, 407

³⁹ *Ibid*, 407

you better know it's time to get on up and get outta there, because you know something stupid is next."⁴⁰

Another example of racism that Davis experienced occurred to his father in 1960. His father was hit by a train at an unmarked train cross out in the country. His father had to wait for an ambulance that would take black people as the original ambulance that came to treat and take him to the hospital only would help white people. According to Davis, after this incident his father had issues the rest of his life picking things up because his hands would shake.⁴¹

Like for Gillespie, this was unfortunately something that Davis and every other black person in America during this era had to deal with. Unlike Gillespie, though, it is hard to tell if Davis feels that bebop was able to bring people together and break racial barriers. It may be up to the experience of each artist. For what ever reason Gillespie may have been more open to the idea of breaking racial barriers and therefore saw it happen before him. Davis maybe had trouble with this idea because he did not believe that the white community respected bebop as he experienced many instances of racial tension surrounding bebop, such as the incident he experienced with the comedian Milton Berle. It is also clear that Davis feels that the white community stole and took credit for music that was culturally black. Throughout his book he talks about how the white community tried to take credit for bebop, he also talks about how white critics gave credit to the creation of rock and roll to Elvis rather than Chuck Berry.⁴² Because both Gillespie and Davis had different experiences and different

⁴⁰ Davis and Troupe, *Miles*, 407

⁴¹ *Ibid*, 257

⁴² *Ibid*, 406

opinions and dealt with racism differently, they both see the effects that bebop had on racism in the US, and vice versa, differently.

Part III: Bridging Bebop and Hip-Hop – 1950's-1980's

A large period of time exists between Bebop's golden era, the 1940's, and the growth of hip-hop, during the early 1970's. During this time the U.S changed socially at an unprecedented scale.

Lynching and mob violence were still occurring in the U.S during the 1950's. In 1955, 14-year-old Emmett Till was brutally murdered by Roy Bryant and his half brother for allegedly flirting with Bryant's white wife. Bryant shot Till in the head with .45 caliber Colt revolver and then wrapped barbwire around his neck and dumped his body in the Tallahatchie river. Till's mother chose to have an open casket during the funeral to expose the world to the evil of lynching.⁴³

In 1954 the Supreme Court announced that schools will be desegregated in the *Brown vs. Board of Education* case verdict. Chief Justice at the time, Earl Warren, announced the decision, citing the 14th Amendment and used studies to show that segregated schools had 'damaging effects' and that such schools were 'inherently unequal'. The court allowed states to usher this new law in slowly in the hopes that there would be a time of transition, which they phrased as 'all deliberate speed'.⁴⁴ This case was one of the most important obstacles the black community faced in the fight for equal rights. It overturned *Plessy vs. Ferguson* which allowed for separate facilities and services based on race under the equal protection act.⁴⁵

⁴³ Bruce J. Dierenfield, *The Civil Rights Movement* (Edinburgh, UK: Pearson Longman, 2008), 28.

⁴⁴ *Ibid*, 24

⁴⁵ Charles D. Lowery and John F. Marszalek, eds., *Encyclopedia of African-American Civil Rights* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1992), 71.

There were numerous instances where the desegregation of schools were opposed and prevented from occurring. In February 1956 Autherine Lucy enrolled in the University of Alabama. She was met by an angry mob carrying Confederate flags, throwing rotten eggs at her and yelling 'nigger whore' and 'kill her, kill her'. Lucy was expelled for blaming school for failing to control the crowd.⁴⁶

There were other instances similar to that of Autherine Lucy. In Tennessee and Kentucky, mobs met black school children trying to enter white schools. These mobs called for 'nigger blood'. The presence of machine guns, bayonets, and tanks were necessary for the black school children to enter their school.⁴⁷

In 1961 James Meredith applied to Ole Miss, but he omitted his race in his application. Ole Miss accepted Meredith, who was an Air Force veteran, but upon discovering he was black reversed their decision claiming his application was late, that his previous college did not operate on the same calendar, and other ridiculous excuses. Meredith sued Ole Miss and upon appeal Ole Miss was ordered to admit Meredith. After weeks of protests from Mississippi Governor Ross Barnett, Klansmen burning crosses on campus, the necessary presence of U.S Marshalls on campus, and pressure from the White House, Meredith became the first black student to enroll in any white Mississippi school. Upon his entrance of his dormitory, violence ensued and an angry mob of 3,000 people attacked the U.S Marshalls. The National Guard had to be called in, 31,000

⁴⁶ Dierenfield, *The Civil Rights Movement*, 29.

⁴⁷ *Ibid*, 29

troops to protect one student. Two people were killed and roughly 400 hundred injured. The riot was bloody and is a stain on U.S history.⁴⁸

After ten years of instances such as mentioned above, the Supreme Court abolished the 'all deliberate speed' policy. In 1964 the Supreme Court mandated that all schools be segregated 'forthwith'.⁴⁹

The *Brown* verdict may have had limited success, but it did allow the Civil Rights Movement to gain speed and momentum under the guidance of Martin Luther King Jr. In 1963 President John Kennedy put his backing behind the Civil Rights Movement. He declared segregation a 'moral crisis' which needed fixing at a federal level. President Kennedy outlined a bill, later known as the Civil Rights Act of 1964, guaranteeing voter rights, requiring equal access to restaurants, bathrooms, gas stations, schooling, and equal employment. The bill also stated the federal government held the right to withhold federal funding from anyone who violated this act.⁵⁰

The Voting Rights Act of 1965 preceded the Civil Rights Act of 1964. This federal law banned literacy tests and intimidation tactics at polling stations. In Selma, AL, 60 percent of the black population registered to vote on the day the Voting Rights Act was enacted.⁵¹

In 1968 President Lyndon Johnson's 'Great Society' led to the creation of the Office of Economic Opportunity. This was set up to aid underprivileged citizens who could not afford necessary items. The OEO provided vocational

⁴⁸ I Dierenfield, *The Civil Rights Movement*, 71-77

⁴⁹ Ibid, 30

⁵⁰ Lowery and Marszalek, *Encyclopedia of African-American Civil*, 107-108.

⁵¹ Dierenfield, *The Civil Rights Movement*, 123

training, food stamps, and programs for troubled youth, legal aid for those who could not afford it, and Medicaid to help treat the health problems of the poor. These types of programs improved the quality of life for impoverished Americans, most of which were black, but did nothing to help develop skills and opportunities to climb out of poverty.⁵²

In spite of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, not all was improving for the black community. In Mississippi only 5.2 percent of the black population could vote, in the rest of the south only one third of the black population could vote. 80 percent of the black community in Mississippi was living in poverty and welfare provided by President Johnson's social programs was going to poor white families first.⁵³

There was a growing frustration in the black community post Civil Rights Movement because not much seemed to change. Ghettos were becoming a major problem in cities across the country. Realtors were steering black homebuyers to black neighborhoods, essentially segregating cities. Because of this white families were moving away to the suburbs and more black families moved in to cities. Most black families were low income and needed help. In response to this the government started public housing projects which provided housing for low income families. These large apartment buildings became a hub for drug use, gang violence, attracted police attention and brutality, and led to second rate schools.

⁵² Dierenfield, *The Civil Rights Movement*, 95

⁵³ *Ibid*, 99

Most jobs held in the black community were dead end job with no opportunity of climbing up in their profession. This prevented black families in the inner city from climbing out of poverty as there were no opportunities to do so.⁵⁴

Out of this frustration grew militant groups such as the Black Panthers. The Black Panthers were founded in 1966 in Oakland, California by Bobby Seale and Huey Newton. They patrolled the streets of Oakland carrying guns. The Black Panthers were run in military fashion and were dedicated to self-defense against racist aggression. They would trail police in Oakland to monitor police interaction with the black community. They demanded control of their own communities, freedom to decide their own destiny, improved housing and education, exemption from military service, justice, and liberation from the control of the white community. The Black Panthers saw the black community as a colony under control of a white nation.⁵⁵ The Black Panthers were also active in the community in other ways. The women Black Panthers would run community schools, provide free shoes, health services, legal services, food for children, and trips to visit imprisoned relatives. Over the course of two years, the Black Panthers were able to attract a few thousand members across twenty different cities.⁵⁶

Frustrations in the black community carried over from the 1960's to the 1970's and 1980's as the standard of living and treatment by police was not improving. In 1979 thirty-nine-year-old Eula Mae, who stood an intimidating five-foot-four-inch, was shot over twelve times by two LAPD officers. Mae called in

⁵⁴ I Dierenfield, *The Civil Rights Movement*, 127

⁵⁵ Lowery and Marszalek, *Encyclopedia of African-American Civil*, 52.

⁵⁶ Dierenfield, *The Civil Rights Movement*, 132.

police to prevent a gas maintenance worker from turning off her gas. When the police arrived they saw Mae holding a kitchen knife. They shot her even though she did not act aggressively.⁵⁷

In the early 1980's there were fifteen deaths in the black community caused by LAPD chokeholds. In response to these chokeholds, Chief of Police Darryl Gates exclaimed, "We may be finding that in some blacks when (the chokehold) is applied the veins or arteries do not open up as fast as they do on normal people."⁵⁸

In 1982 the unemployment rate of the black community in South Central LA rose 50 percent. The average income for a black resident of South Central was \$5,900, well below the national average. The unemployment rate among black youths was 45 percent. All of this led to an increase of crime and police presence which caused even more frustration among the black community.⁵⁹

Because of the increase of crime and gang violence associated with the frustrations of the black community post Civil Rights Movement, the LAPD implanted a policy of identifying suspicious characters based on their clothing style.⁶⁰

⁵⁷ Robin D.G. Kelley, *Race Rebels* (New York, NY: Free Press, 1994), 184.

⁵⁸ Kelley, *Race Rebels*, 184.

⁵⁹ *Ibid*, 192

⁶⁰ *Ibid*, 204

Part IV: Hip-Hop

Section A: History and Social Context of Hip-Hop

Hip-Hop did not start out as a musical genre that was meant to entertain an audience at a concert. The original intentions and use of hip-hop was not to record and distribute to make money. Hip-hop was created to entertain friends or friend's friends. According to DJ Kool Herc, one of the original hip-hop artists and who is nicknamed 'The Father', hip-hop was mostly played at house parties or parties put up by hip-hop artists. This was happening in the early 1970's in the Bronx. DJ Kool Herc was one of the first to host such parties and these parties happened on 1520 Sedgwick Ave.⁶¹

According to Herc, hip-hop was not about money, what expensive shoes you were wearing, about what gun you had, or who you were better than. Hip-hop was about being who you are and representing yourself. Herc discussed four key 'hip-hop element's; DJing, B-Boying, MCing, and Graffiti. But he also added the way you walk, the way you talk, the way you look, and the way you communicate as important elements. All of these elements back up his claim that hip-hop is about representing yourself.⁶²



Figure 5: 1520 Sedgwick (owner released work to public domain)

⁶¹ DJ Kool Herc, "Introduction," in *Can't Stop Won't Stop* (New York, NY: Picador, 2005), xi.

⁶² *Ibid*, xi

This same idea was also backed up by Edward Armstrong, who in his article discussed the three elements of hip-hop authenticity and the three cultural symbols in hip-hop. Armstrong agreed with Herc saying that that the most important aspect of hip-hop is being true to oneself. He showed this by explaining that, “Many rappers believe that ‘the subject matter isn’t as important as being true to yourself’”.⁶³

Herc also discussed the importance and influences of hip-hop not only in the black community but in American culture. According to Herc, “I think hip-hop has bridged the culture gap. It brings white kids together with Black kids, brown kids with yellow kids. They all have something in common that they love. It gets past the



Figure 6: DJ Kool Herc - by Scott Gries

Sean Michaels, "DJ Kool Herc Needs Help with Medical Bills," *The Guardian* (UK), January 31, 2011

stereotypes and people hating each other because of those stereotypes.”⁶⁴ This clearly outlines not only the importance of hip-hop to the black community but to American culture because he claimed that the genre has united people of all different cultures and races. This is important in this country because we are a country of multiple cultures and different backgrounds.

This is something that Armstrong also touched on in his article. He discussed how hip-hop may be created and produced by the black community

⁶³ Edward G. Armstrong, "Eminem's Construction of Authenticity," *Popular Music and Society* 27, no. 3 (2004): 337.

⁶⁴ DJ Kool Herc, "Introduction," in *Can't Stop Won't Stop*, xi.

predominantly; but it is actually white suburban teenagers who are the largest consumers of hip-hop.⁶⁵ This shows us that hip-hop has clearly bridged a cultural gap as Herc claims, as the major consumers of hip-hop are not the black community but white suburban teenagers, a very specific demographic.

Hip-Hop was influenced by many different genres of music. DJ Kool Herc was largely influenced by reggae as he was originally from Jamaica.⁶⁶ Afrika Bambaataa, another original hip-hop artist, lists funk and Motown, blues, jazz, and even rock and roll bands like the Rolling Stones and The Beatles as some of his influences to the hip-hop music he created.⁶⁷ Hip-hop groups such as A Tribe Called Quest have openly acknowledged the influences that bebop has had on hip-hop and have even done collaborations with bebop artists on some of their albums.⁶⁸ All of these musical genres came together when people moved into the Bronx, bringing with them an array of different cultures and musical tastes. Each hip-hop artist would say that a different type of music influenced them seeing as there are so many different subgenres of hip-hop. These subgenres range from conscious hip-hop to gangsta rap, from hardcore hip-hop to mafioso rap, and from political hip-hop to freestyle rap.

Afrika Bambaataa described the social context of the 70's that hip-hop was born in, in an interesting way. He talked about how the 1970's was a time of revolutionary groups such as the Black Panthers, the Nation of Islam, and the Ku

⁶⁵ Armstrong, "Eminem's Construction of Authenticity," 336

⁶⁶ DJ DJ Kool Herc, "Introduction," in *Can't Stop Won't Stop*, xii.

⁶⁷ Afrika Bambaataa, "An Interview w/ Afrika Bambaataa," *Davey D's Hip Hop Corner* (blog), entry posted June 18, 2010, <http://hiphopandpolitics.wordpress.com/2010/06/18/a-recent-interview-w-afrika-bambaataa-history-influence-direction/>.

⁶⁸ Evan Serpick, "A Tribe Called Quest," *Rolling Stone*, 2001, 1, <http://www.rollingstone.com/music/artists/a-tribe-called-quest/biography>.

Klux Klan. He also talked about how it was a time of police brutality, drugs and crimes, as well as hustlers and pimps. He discussed how the 1970's was also the beginning era of block parties, creating tightly knit communities. Bambaata discussed how different kinds of music were starting to grow in cities such as salsa, funk and rock. Bambaataa mentioned how hip-hop grew during the era of the end of the Vietnam War which was an unpopular war and divided the nation.⁶⁹ It was a time of much cultural tumultuousness and there was a sense of social uncertainty. Some of this tumultuousness and social uncertainty were in relation to the frustrations of the black community as they felt little change post Civil Rights Movement. This frustration caused racial tensions, racial tensions which hip-hop grew out of.

Afrika Bambaataa claimed that modern hip-hop has changed since the 1970's in the hip-hop scene. Bambaataa said, "There are those who know the culture of Hip Hop Culture and there are many who do not and only follow rappers of Hip Hop who have a hit record."⁷⁰ He also talked about how there is an element of hip-hop that is now controlled by corporations and therefore has lost its authenticity. This change in the culture of hip-hop was not a sudden change and was gradual.



Figure 7: Afrika Bambaataa

Afrika Bambaataa, "An Interview w/ Afrika Bambaataa," *Davey D's Hip Hop Corner* (blog), entry posted June 18, 2010,

⁶⁹ Bambaataa, "An Interview w/ Afrika," interview, *Davey D's Hip Hop Corner* (blog).

⁷⁰ Ibid

In the mid 80's hip-hop started crossing racial boundaries. Def Jam, a label company, was the leader in doing this, first by hiring Bill Adler and Rick Rubin, both white Jewish men from Long Island, to work along Russell Simmons, a legend in the hip-hop industry for his innovative ideas in marketing hip-hop.⁷¹ Def Jam then was able to complete what they called a desegregation plan, by being able to get black audiences to buy and listen to the Beastie Boys, a white hip-hop group, album, *License to Ill*, and white audiences to buy and listen to the Run DMC's, a black hip-hop group, album, *Raising Hell*. By 1986 Def Jam had accomplished this and called the desegregation plan a success. At the time Adler described this feat as 'monumental and the Beastie Boys and Run DMC are revolutionaries'. He also described rap at the time as a musical genre that was going to bring America back together and reintegrate its culture.⁷²

Up into the late 80's and early to mid 90's hip-hop was seen as an aggressive response to racism. There were bands such as Public Enemy who were writing songs about fighting racial profiling and supported black power groups such as the Black Panthers.⁷³ There were up and coming bands such as N.W.A who were coming out of the gangsta rap scene that were rapping about racial segregation, police brutality, and calling on people to take things into their own hands in their album *Straight Out of Compton*. The most notable song on that album 'Fuck tha Police' has been attributed to the LA riots that rocked the neighborhood of Watts in South Central LA in 1992. The song called for people to take up in arms, take things into your own hands and fight the man so to

⁷¹ Jeff Chang, *Can't Stop Won't Stop* (New York, NY: Picador, 2005), 243.

⁷² Ibid, 245

⁷³ Ibid, 232

speak. These songs were essentially speaking for a generation and expressing the feelings towards economic disparity.⁷⁴

The things that N.W.A and Public Enemy were rapping about were the same issues that Afrika Bambaataa described as creating social turmoil and uncertainty in the 1970s when hip-hop was born. In the end DJ Kool Herc was right; hip-hop did cross the racial barrier and bring people together, but it happened through an aggressive and expressive manner.

Section B: KRS One –Sound of Da Police

KRS One was born on August 20th, 1965 in Brooklyn, NY. His real name is Lawrence Krisna Parker. KRS One came of age during the beginnings of hip-hop and is considered an influential figure in hip-hop. He is known as the 'Teacha' because he studies hip-hop's culture in scholarly fashion and lectures on the topic around the world. DJ Kool Herc, the father of hip-hop, dubbed him the son of hip-hop. Most importantly though KRS One grew up and experienced the same social setting that Afrika Bambaataa described earlier.⁷⁵

KRS One came out with 'Sound of Da Police' in 1993 in response to crack-downs and more punishment on crime related to drugs and gangs after President Richard Nixon declared war on the drugs in the 1971.⁷⁶ The crack-downs affected the black community severely which created racial tension during the early 80's and the early 90's. During the 80's the war on drugs meant increased policing and police control and this did not sit well with the black

⁷⁴ Chang, *Can't Stop Won't Stop*, 231.

⁷⁵ "About KRS One," KRS One, <http://www.krs-one.com/about/>.

⁷⁶ Claire Suddath, "The War on Drugs," *Time*, March 25, 2009,

community as they were already experience a vicious poverty cycle and the presence of police did not seem to help. This only angered the black community.

There also seemed to be an increase of police brutality that seemed racially triggered. This can be seen in 1980 in New Orleans when a young white cop was killed by a gunshot wound to the neck. The police responded by hailing gunshots which ended up killing four innocent black citizens. Seven officers were charged with federal crimes; however the damage had been done. This later became known as the Infamous Algiers 7.⁷⁷

During the mid 80's to the early mid 90's the homicide rate among black people doubled. The victimization in homicides among the black community doubled as well during this time period.⁷⁸ This is not to say that these figures were related to increase of policing and police presence or even police



Figure 8: KRS One - by Michael Ochs

Evan Serpick, "KRS-One," *Rolling Stone*, 2001, 1

brutality, however it is a measure of what the black community was going through at this time. It was not a time of harmonious cooperative living, but there was a real tension in the air and these figures highlight that.

Incidents such as these created a state of mind that the police were simply reinforcing racial tensions, not preventing them, and this led to a lot of bad

⁷⁷ Brendan McCarthy, "Claire Suddath, 'The War on Drugs,' Time, March 25, 2009," *The Times-Picayune*, November 7, 2010

⁷⁸ Alexia Cooper and Erica L. Smith, *Homicide Trends in the United States, 1980-2008*, research report (US Department of Justice, 2011), 11.

sentiment towards the police. KRS One's song 'Sound of Da Police' highlights this and accuses the police of essentially being slave drivers. This can be seen in this excerpt of the song, "You claim I'm sellin' crack but you be doin' that, I'd rather say 'See ya' cause I would never be ya, Be a officer? You wicked overseer."⁷⁹ Overseer is in direct reference to slavery when slaves would be watched by overseers while they were doing their work. He does this again when making direct comparisons of overseers to the police, "the overseer rode around the plantation, the officer is off patrolling the nation, the overseer couldn't stop you what you're doing, the officer will pull you over when he is just pursuing, the overseer had the right to get ill, and if you fought back the overseer had the right to kill."⁸⁰

KRS One later in the song goes on to accuse the police of doing minimal work in the jobs as well as accusing them of racial profiling. This can be seen in the following excerpt, "Are you really for peace and equality? Or when my car is hooked up, You know you wanna follow me, your laws are minimal, 'Cause you won't even think about lookin' at the real criminal."⁸¹ This is in reference to equality towards the way police acted towards the black community. He also accuses them of profiling when he says, "You won't even think about lookin' at the real criminal," and again, "Be just a mere Black man, them want check me."⁸²

⁷⁹ KRS One, "Sound of Da Police," on *Return of the Boom Bap*, compact disc

⁸⁰ Ibid

⁸¹ Ibid

⁸² Ibid

KRS One goes on to even accuse the police of the being the real criminals when he says, "The real criminals are the COP".⁸³ This clearly shows and sums up KRS One's sentiments towards the police while trying to express the same sentiments held throughout some of the black community.

KRS One's 'Sound of Da Police' is a great example of hip-hop being used to express oneself against racism and racial tensions. KRS One makes his opinions absolutely clear and does not hold back. He compares police to overseers, accuses them of racial profiling, and calls them criminals. This is a great example of how hip-hop has been used to fight racism in an outspoken, expressive, and somewhat aggressive manner.

For the full lyrics of 'Sound of Da Police' see Appendix A.

Section C: N.W.A – Fuck Tha Police

N.W.A, which stands for 'Niggaz Wit Attitude', was one of the first gangsta rap bands, a sub genre of hip-hop, and was responsible for gangsta rap's popularity. The use of the word 'Niggaz' in their name was symbolic of the fact that they felt nothing has changed since the times when it was socially acceptable to call a black man 'nigger'.⁸⁴ Formed in the late 1980's and disbanded in the early 1990's, the band grew up in Compton, CA a place that faced economic disparity and intense policing due to the war on drugs that KRS One rapped about. N.W.A's lyrics were equally negative of police attitudes towards the black community as well as economic disparity that the black

⁸³ KRS One, "Sound of Da Police."

⁸⁴ Kelley, *Race Rebels*, 210.

community faced. However N.W.A were notorious for sending this message using profane, violent, and misogynistic lyrics which was a typical characteristic of gangsta rap subgenre and, maybe surprisingly, the genres biggest fan group was white suburban teenagers.⁸⁵

N.W.A consisted of Eric 'Eazy-E' Wright, who was a former drug dealer and used his profit to create a recording company which N.W.A grew out of, O'Shea 'Ice Cube' Jackson, who grew up in a two parent middle class family, and Andre 'Dr. Dre' Young. The other two members of N.W.A were Lorenzo Jerald Patterson, also known as MC Ren, and Antoine Carraby, also known as DJ

Yella.⁸⁶



Figure 10: N.W.A (from left to right) DJ Yella, MC Ren, Eazy-E, and Dr. Dre (Ice Cube is not featured) – by Corbis

Ben Child, "F Gary Gray in talks to direct NWA biopic *Straight Outta Compton*," *The Guardian* (UK), April 11, 2012

N.W.A is most well known for their hit album *Straight Outta Compton* which was seen as a foreshadowing to the L.A riots in 1992. The album most popular song was 'Fuck tha Police' which the group received a warning for from the FBI because of its

threatening language and for what it called people to do.⁸⁷

⁸⁵ Stephen Thomas Erlewine, "Biography," N.W.A World, accessed November 21, 2012, <http://www.nwaworld.com/biography.php>.

⁸⁶ Evan Serpick, "N.W.A.," *Rolling Stone*, 2001, 1, <http://www.rollingstone.com/music/artists/n-w-a/biography>.

⁸⁷ *Ibid*, 1.

The song is a statement about the feelings and attitudes towards the police by young black people. N.W.A was trying to express the frustrations that the black community had towards the police, especially the LAPD. They used their lyrics to speak out in a way that had never been done before and was so radical and extreme that it got them banned from radio stations and MTV.⁸⁸

In a separate interview Ice Cube described what N.W.A was trying to do with their music as followed, “We call ourselves underground street reporters. We just tell it how we see it, nothing more, nothing less.”⁸⁹

When talking about *Straight Outta Compton* and what message they were trying to convey, MC Ren explains, “See, people who get scared are scared of the truth; they were scared of it cause it’s so real. It tells the truth about how the police harass innocent people all the time in gang sweeps of Los Angeles.”⁹⁰

In the same interview they also address the violence that is present in their music. Ice Cube justifies the use of violence in their lyrics by claiming, “It’s like they think violence just started when we made our records. But, you know, violence has been around forever, and it’s gonna stay here till the end of the world, so everybody should just wake up.”⁹¹ Ice Cube goes on to back this up by explaining that movies such as *Rambo* and *The Terminator* were around before they came out with *Straight Outta Compton* and that people went to go see those

⁸⁸ Serpick, "N.W.A," 1.

⁸⁹ Kelley, *Race Rebels*, 190.

⁹⁰ Eazy-E, MC Ren, and Ice Cube, "NWA Interview," by Frank Andrich, Rap Basement, last modified 1990, <http://www.icecube.org/nwainterview.php>.

⁹¹ Ibid

extremely violent movies where people were getting killed. Ice Cube points out that this should not be any different to listening to music.⁹²

The first piece of evidence that shows N.W.A speaking out against racism by police is in the first verse of the song where Ice Cube raps, “Young nigga got it bad got it bad cause I’m brown, and not the other color so police think they have the authority to kill a minority.”⁹³ In this segment they are accusing the police of racial profiling and treating black people differently. Another example of this is seen when Ice Cube raps, “Searchin my car, lookin for the product, Thinkin every nigga is sellin narcotics”.⁹⁴

However after this the lyrics get more violent about the police and less so about what the police actually do to people in the black community. There are numerous times during the song where N.W.A describes how they would hurt police officers, what they would do to them if they were not carrying a gun or a badge for that matter, and call upon others to follow suit. This can be seen when they rap, “Beat tha police outta shape, And when I’m finished, bring the yellow tape to tape off the scene of the slaughter.”⁹⁵ Here they blatantly say how they want to cause severe physical harm to police officers; whether or not they imply death in this instance is up to interpretation. This is again seen when they rap, “A young nigga on a warpath, And when I’m finished, it’s gonna be a blood bath of cops, Dyin in LA.” These may be the most violent and graphic images of violence

⁹² Eazy-E, MC Ren, and Ice Cube, "NWA Interview," interview, Rap Basement.

⁹³ "Fuck the Police," performed by O'Shea 'Ice Cube' Jackson, Eric 'Eazy-E' Wright, and Andre 'Dr. Dre' Jackson, recorded August 8, 1988, on *Straight Outta Compton*, 1988, compact disc.

⁹⁴ Ibid

⁹⁵ Ibid

in the album directed at police and also directly foreshadow what was to come in the L.A riots of 1992 in South Central where Compton is located.

During the riots mostly white people were the target of violence as well as the Korean community. Innocent bystanders became the victims of violence and the police stood by because the black community of South Central was calling for the blood of the police. The police and the National Guard were kept out of this part of the city to essentially let it burn away.⁹⁶ There are many different reasons and causes for the riots that date back in the early 80's. But when N.W.A were rapping these lyrics they were directly foreshadowing what was to come in 1992 without knowing it because they were rapping the feelings of the black community in South Central in an extremely blunt way.

After N.W.A disbanded in 1991 for internal issues, mostly involving finances, Dr. Dre went on to be one of the most successful hip-hop producers in the music's history. He found Eminem and created a new rap empire, like the one that N.W.A had aspired to be. Eazy-E continued to produce hip-hop and also came out with his own solo albums. He died of complications with AIDS in 1995. Ice-Cube, like Dr. Dre, also went on to become a highly successful producer but also came out with numerous successful solo albums. He also has an acting career.⁹⁷

This may not be the best way to go about overcoming racism however it is still a statement against racism, mostly racism from the police. It is an aggressive statement that is extremely expressive by using violent graphics and lyrics. Their

⁹⁶ Phillip Chardon, "LA Riots," South Central History, accessed November 21, 1992, <http://www.southcentralhistory.com/la-riots.php>.

⁹⁷ Serpick, "N.W.A," 1.

style worked and N.W.A went on to be extremely successful and are folklore within hip-hop's history.

Although it is not the most effective way to do it, it is still a statement against racism and is an example of how hip-hop was an aggressive response and an expressive response to racism in the black community.

For the full lyrics of "Fuck tha Police" see Appendix B.

Section C: Public Enemy – *Fear of a Black Planet*



Figure 11: Public Enemy – by Michael Ochs

Evan Serpick, "Public Enemy," *Rolling Stone*, 2001, 1,

samples of audio clips.⁹⁸

Public Enemy was one of the most acclaimed hip-hop groups from the late 80's and early 90's. They were praised for the social and political themes in their lyrics while also tackling the use of violent and misogynistic lyrics in hip-hop. Many music critics claim that Public Enemy changed the musical spectrum of hip-hop by adding different elements into their music such as sirens, skirted turntable scratches, and spoken

Public Enemy consisted of Carlton Ridenhour, also known as Chuck D, William Drayton Jr., also known as Flavor Flav, Richard Griffin, also known as Professor Griff, and Norman Rogers, also known as Terminator X. The group is still active but there have been a couple of group member changes.⁹⁹

⁹⁸ Evan Serpick, "Public Enemy," *Rolling Stone*, 2001, 1, <http://www.rollingstone.com/music/artists/public-enemy/biography>.

⁹⁹ Ibid

Public Enemy, especially Chuck D who is the leader and spokesman of the group, were heavily influenced by the Black Panther Party and the Nation of Islam, according to Chuck D.¹⁰⁰ Public Enemy back this up by claiming that their music is a commentary of the struggle of the black man. They also discuss how they viewed themselves as a continuation of the struggle of the black man and in a way continuing the work of the Black Panther Party and the Nation of Islam by providing a voice for the black community.¹⁰¹

In 1990 Public Enemy released the album *Fear of a Black Planet* in which the main social and political theme was racism towards the black community by the white community. In this album they discussed the roots of white racism and in what forms it exists and why it exists. It touches on empowering the black community as well as the concept of white supremacy.¹⁰² Although not one of the singles released off of the album, the song 'Fear of a Black Planet', the namesake of the album, touches on all the above-mentioned concepts. 'Fear of a Black Planet' focuses on the perceived fear that white people have of black people. This is unlike the two other examples mentioned earlier, KRS One and N.W.A, which focus on the way the black community is treated by the police. Public Enemy are different because they take a much broader approach to racism directed at the black community by addressing the question why white people are afraid of black people.

¹⁰⁰ "Hip-Hip, you don't stop," *The Guardian* (UK), June 18, 2006

¹⁰¹ Chuck D and Professor Griff, "An interview with Public Enemy," by Goran M., Marxist, last modified September 2003, http://www.marxist.com/ArtAndLiterature-old/public_enemy_interview.html.

¹⁰² Serpick, "Public Enemy," 1.

The questioning of white racism directed towards the black community in 'Fear of a Black Planet' can be seen when Public Enemy rap, "Excuse us for the news, You might not be amused, But did you not know white comes from Black, No need to be confused."¹⁰³ Public Enemy here is implying that Adam and Eve were most likely black people therefore we are all descendents of black people. Public Enemy continues this idea when they rap, "Excuse us for the news, I question those accused, Why is this fear of Black from White, Influence who you choose?"¹⁰⁴ Here they directly propose the question and outline the main theme of their song.

Public Enemy discuss fear of black people by white people again when the rap, "I've been wondering why, People livin' in fear, Of my shade, (Or my hi top fade), I'm not the one runnin', But they got me on the run, Treat me like I have a gun, All I got is genes and chromosomes."¹⁰⁵ Public Enemy point out that they too are humans when they say, "all I got is genes and chromosomes". He also points out racial stereotypes that because he is black he might have a gun, implying that this is one of the reasons why white people are afraid of black people, according to Public Enemy.

Public Enemy also discussed mixed race families and why that is frowned upon. This can be seen when they rap, "What's wrong with some color in your family tree, I don't know."¹⁰⁶ Here Public Enemy question why white and black

¹⁰³ "Fear of a Black Planet," performed by Carlton 'Chuck D' Ridenhour, William 'Flavor Flav' Drayton Jr., and Norman 'Terminator X' Rogers, recorded April 10, 1990, on *Fear of a Black Planet*, performed by Carlton 'Chuck D' Ridenhour, William 'Flavor Flav' Drayton Jr., and Norman 'Terminator X' Rogers, 1990, compact disc.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid

¹⁰⁵ Ibid

¹⁰⁶ Ibid

need to be divided, they discuss why there needs to be a racial barrier basically. This is something that is within context of their overall message as a band.

The message of co-existence is seen later in the song when they rap, "All I want is peace and love on this planet, On this planet, (Ain't that how God planned it?)"¹⁰⁷ This is important because it shows that Public Enemy did want to break down racial barriers and they did want co-existence and that they did not hold hatred towards the white community. This is important because it shows a willingness to work together which is essential in breaking down racial barriers.

Public Enemy does fight racism with hip-hop in an aggressive and expressive way. They were open about their ideas and tried to send a clear and constructive message to both the white community and the black community. They take a stance against racism and speak out against it through their messages in their music. Public Enemy was an expressive hip-hop group as well being not afraid to express their opinions on issues of race. Public Enemy have been recognized for being expressive about race issues and have received rewards for this such as the MOBO in 2005, Music of Black Origin award, for their outstanding contribution to black music.¹⁰⁸

For the full lyrics of 'Fear of a Black Planet' see Appendix C.

¹⁰⁷ "Fear of a Black."

¹⁰⁸ Anonymous post to BBC newsgroup, "Lemar 'over moon' at Mobo double," December 23, 2005, accessed November 22, 2012, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/entertainment/4270416.stm>.

Part V: Comparison of Bebop and Hip-Hop

Comparing bebop and hip-hop can identify many similarities between the two genres of music. Both genres appeared during times in history, the 1940's and 1970's to early 1990's, where the black community was exposed to police brutality, segregation, and economic inequalities. Both in their own right, were responses to racism. Both genres of music crossed over racial barriers and were shared by both the white and the black communities. Bebop was able to influence hip-hop bands such as a Tribe Called Quest, who used elements of bebop in their music.

Bebop grew out of a time of extreme racism and segregation that was engrained in much of the culture. This affected beboppers abilities to play in certain clubs, like we saw with Dizzy Gillespie whose band was fired because they came in through the front door. The black community was subject to unequal treatment by police and segregation during this time as well.

Similar to bebop, hip-hop grew up during a time of social instability. The country was going through a period of transition because of the civil rights movement. Segregation and racism was so an important and present part of U.S history and the civil rights movement caused a big change for some people. People had to learn how to change certain attitudes and mannerism that were accepted before the civil rights movement. Even after the civil rights movement there economic inequality, and there was an increase of police presence and intervention. The war on drugs created animosity between the black community and the police, which was similar to the way the black community felt about

police during the 1940's. This led to frustration in the black community because it seemed like little had changed since the civil rights movement.

Hip-hop grew at a time when the nation was divided due to the effects of the Vietnam War, which is similar to bebop because during bebop's era the nation was divided due to racial segregation. Many would argue not only was the nation divided in the 1970's because of the Vietnam War, but because of desegregation as well and because of the frustrations by the black community.

Both bebop and hip-hop were a response to racism directed towards the black community. Bebop was a response because it was representative of the black community's culture and no matter what was said about the music and the artists that played bebop; they kept on playing and played with passion. Hip-hop too was a response to racism because it became political. Hip-hop groups like Public Enemy, N.W.A and KRS-One were rapping about social and political issues that were about black communities. They rapped lyrics that reflected the voice of the black community in opposition of racism. Hip-hop became a way to vent the frustrations of the black community and therefore was a response to racism.

Both bebop and hip-hop were able to crossover racial barriers and bring people together. We saw this with Dizzy Gillespie who described how when playing in California he saw tens of thousands of people testifying for bebop who were not only black but also white and both the white and the black people were doing this together. In hip-hop we saw Def Jam bring two white Jewish men to work alongside Russell Simmons, a black man. These men were able to get

white audiences to listen to Run DMC and black audiences to listen to Beastie Boys. In the early 90's and late 80's N.W.A's biggest fan group was not the black community but was actually white suburban teenagers.

As many similarities as there were between hip-hop and bebop, there were also differences. Bebop was not an aggressive form of music and did not respond to racism in an aggressive way. Not all hip-hop groups played aggressive music; hip-hop did have a number of groups that played aggressive music that expressed frustration with racism in a violent way, such as N.W.A.

Bebop's music was not specifically about racism; there were no spoken words that directly opposed racism. This is not to say that it was not a response, though, as it was because the artists themselves opposed and responded to racism. Bebop's simple existence and presence within the music world was a response to racism because it gave black artists media exposure. Miles Davis described bebop as an invasion on 52nd Street because there were so many more black people playing there at the time. He said that this made the white community uncomfortable.

Hip-hop's music was much more aggressive and vocal in its fight against racism. Hip-hop's lyrics contained words that directly opposed racism, they contained words that were negative towards the way police treated the black community, and they contained words that described and questioned white racism towards the black community. Hip-hop also had more violent lyrics in their music in some instances, such as by N.W.A, which was not seen at all in bebop.

Part VI: Conclusion

In conclusion, bebop has taken a more passive aggressive stance towards racism and issues of race during its golden era, but hip-hop on the other hand took a more aggressively expressive stance towards racism during its era. The difference between the two is that bebop experienced racism that was directed towards it as a musical genre, whereas hip-hop was a response to racism.

Bebop grew during a time of segregation, social inequality and economic disparity. It grew in Harlem and its popularity grew when it moved to 52nd Street in front of white audiences. This made the white community uncomfortable and created racial tensions, as Miles Davis showed us. Gillespie showed us that bebop was a not so in-your-face response to racism, but was still seen as a rebellion against the white community and racism that was directed towards the black community. We also saw how bebop artists had to face racism in their daily life. Dizzy Gillespie's band was fired from entering through the front door instead of the back door in St. Louis. Gillespie showed us how it affected him personally too when he was banned from playing with his white friend when they were young boys because of the difference of skin color. Miles Davis showed us racism in his personal life when an ambulance refused to help his father, who had been hit by a train, because they did not serve black people. Davis showed us how racism affected his business life as well when a famous comedian called them savages at a show. Years later Davis ran into this comedian and reminded him of the comment.

Hip-hop grew during the post civil rights movement. This was a time when the country was going through a transition, where police brutality and an increase of economic inequality were present. Hip-hop grew during a rebellious era when groups such as the Black Panther Party and the Nation of Islam were ever present in black communities. The war on drugs in the 80's created more police presence within the black community which created animosity between the police and the black community. Economic disparity, police presence and brutality, and economic stagnation made the black community frustrated as it seemed that nothing had changed since the Civil Rights Movement.

Both KRS One and N.W.A rapped about police presence and in aggressive and accusatory style. Both accused the police of being the real criminals and racial profiling. KRS One accused the police of being like overseers and allowing and facilitating racism. N.W.A accused the police of racism, brutality, and racial profiling. Both KRS One and N.W.A responded to racism in a more in your face manner accusing police and being expressive in their fight against racism. N.W.A did this in a more violent way than KRS One did and created the gangsta rap style of hip-hop. Public Enemy fought against racism in an expressive and aggressive manner as well, choosing to use social and political themes in their albums and songs. Public Enemy not only chose to fight the police with their lyrics but chose to fight the white community as a whole, challenging the fear for black people that Public Enemy perceived the white community to have. Hip-hop chose to rap about what was reality for the black

community, which was radical at the time and had not been done before. This specifically characterized hip-hop's fight against racism.

There are many similarities between the two genres such as the eras in which the both grew up in, the fact that they both crashed down racial barriers and brought the black community and the white community together. We saw this with the crowds the Dizzy Gillespie was able to draw that was a mix of white and black people. In hip-hop we saw this with Def Jam's ability to desegregate audiences and get both black and white audiences to listen to black and white hip-hop groups.

There were differences between the two as well. Bebop was not the same kind of response to racism that hip-hop was. Bebop's presence on 52nd Street, like Miles Davis described, was a response on its own. Hip-hop was much more expressive and aggressive in its response, like we saw in the violent lyrics that N.W.A used when describing police. Hip-hop also called upon people to take action, something that bebop did not do.

More research could be done on why hip-hop has changed since the mid 90s to a mainstream genre of music that does not make much identification with a fight against racism. Is there less racism in the US today? Has money played a role in the change of hip-hop? Has hip-hop lost its roots and are its roots forgotten by mainstream hip-hop artists?

Appendix A – KRS One ‘Sound of Da Police’

Woop, woop, that's the sound of da police
Woop, woop, that's the sound of da beast
Woop, woop, that's the sound of da police
Woop, woop, that's the sound of da beast
Yes, indeed

Woop, woop, that's the sound of da police
Woop, woop, that's the sound of da beast
Woop, woop, that's the sound of da police
Woop, woop, that's the sound of da beast
Yes, indeed

Stand clear, don' man a talk, you can't stand where I stand
You can't walk where I walk, watch out, we run New York
Police man come, we bust him out the park
I know this for a fact, you don't like how I act
You claim I'm sellin' crack but you be doin' that
I'd rather say "See ya" 'cause I would never be ya
Be a officer? You wicked overseer

Ya hotshot, wanna get props and be a saviour
First show a little respect, change your behavior
Change your attitude, change your plan
There could never really be justice on stolen land

Are you really for peace and equality? Or when my car is hooked up
You know you wanna follow me, your laws are minimal
'Cause you won't even think about lookin' at the real criminal
This has got to cease
'Cause we be getting hyped to the sound of da police

Woop, woop, that's the sound of da police
Woop, woop, that's the sound of da beast
Woop, woop, that's the sound of da police
Woop, woop, that's the sound of da beast

Now, here's a likkle truth open up your eye
While you're checking out the boom box, check the exercise
Take the word "Overseer," like a sample
Repeat it very quickly in a crew for example

Overseer, overseer, overseer, overseer
Officer, Officer, Officer, Officer, yeah, officer from overseer
You need a little clarity? Check the similarity

The overseer rode around the plantation
The officer is off patrolling all the nation
The overseer couldn't stop you what you're doing
The officer will pull you over just when he's pursuing
The overseer had the right to get ill
And if you fought back, the overseer had the right to kill

The officer has the right to arrest

And if you fight back they put a hole in your chest
Woop, they both ride horses
After 400 years, I've got no choices

The police them have a little gun
So when I'm on the streets, I walk around with a bigger one
Woop, woop, I hear it all day
Just so they can run the light and be upon their way

Yes, indeed (4X)

Woop, woop, that's the sound of da police
Woop, woop, that's the sound of da beast
Woop, woop, that's the sound of da police
Woop, woop, that's the sound of da beast

Check out the message in a rough stylee
The real criminals are the COP
You check for undercover and the one PD
But just a mere Black man, them want check me
Them check out me car for it shine like the sun
But them jealous or them vexed 'cause them can't afford one

Black people still slaves up 'til today
But the Black police officer nah see it that way
Him want a salary, him want it
So he put on a badge and kill people for it

My grandfather had to deal with the cops
My great-grandfather dealt with the cops
My great-grandfather had to deal with the cops
And then my great, great, great, great, when it's gonna stop?

Woop, woop, that's the sound of da police
Woop, woop, that's the sound of da beast
Woop, woop, that's the sound of da police
Woop, woop, that's the sound of da beast

Woop, woop, that's the sound of da police
Woop, woop, that's the sound of da beast
Woop, woop, that's the sound of da police
Woop, woop, that's the sound of da beast

Yes, indeed (4X)

Woop, woop, that's the sound of da police
Woop, woop, that's the sound of da beast
Woop, woop, that's the sound of da police
Woop, woop, that's the sound of da beast

Appendix B – N.W.A ‘Fuck Tha Police’

Right about now NWA court is in full effect.
Judge Dre presiding in the case of NWA versus the police department.
Prosecuting attorneys are MC Ren Ice Cube and Eazy muthafuckin E.
Order order order. Ice Cube take the muthafuckin stand.
Do you swear to tell the truth the whole truth
And nothin but the truth so help your black ass?

Why don't you tell everybody what the fuck you gotta say?

Fuck tha police
Comin straight from the underground
Young nigga got it bad cuz I'm brown
And not the other color so police think
They have the authority to kill a minority

Fuck that shit, cuz I ain't tha one
For a punk muthafucka with a badge and a gun
To be beatin on, and throwin in jail
We could go toe to toe in the middle of a cell

Fuckin with me cuz I'm a teenager
With a little bit of gold and a pager
Searchin my car, lookin for the product
Thinkin every nigga is sellin narcotics

You'd rather see me in the pen
Then me and Lorenzo rollin in the Benzo
Beat tha police outta shape
And when I'm finished, bring the yellow tape
To tape off the scene of the slaughter
Still can't swallow bread and water

I don't know if they fags or what
Search a nigga down and grabbin his nuts
And on the other hand, without a gun they can't get none
But don't let it be a black and a white one
Cuz they slam ya down to the street top
Black police showin out for the white cop

Ice Cube will swarm
On any muthafucka in a blue uniform
Just cuz I'm from the CPT, punk police are afraid of me
A young nigga on a warpath
And when I'm finished, it's gonna be a bloodbath
Of cops, dyin in LA
Yo Dre, I got somethin to say

Fuck the police (4X)

M. C. Ren, will you please give your testimony to the jury about this fucked up incident.

Fuck tha police and Ren said it with authority
Because the niggaz on the street is a majority.
A gang, is with whoever I'm stepping
And the motherfuckin' weapon
Is kept in a stash box, for the so-called law
Wishin' Ren was a nigga that they never saw

Lights start flashin behind me
But they're scared of a nigga so they mace me to blind me
But that shit don't work, I just laugh
Because it gives em a hint not to step in my path

To the police I'm sayin fuck you punk
Readin my rights and shit, it's all junk
Pullin out a silly club, so you stand
With a fake assed badge and a gun in your hand

But take off the gun so you can see what's up
And we'll go at it punk, I'ma fuck you up

Make ya think I'm a kick your ass
But drop your gat, and Ren's gonna blast
I'm sneaky as fuck when it comes to crime
But I'm a smoke em now, and not next time

Smoke any muthafucka that sweats me
Or any assho that threatens me
I'm a sniper with a hell of a scope
Takin out a cop or two, they can't cope with me

The muthafuckin villian that's mad
With potential to get bad as fuck
So I'm a turn it around
Put in my clip, yo, and this is the sound
Ya, somethin like that, but it all depends on the size of the gat

Takin out a police would make my day
But a nigga like Ren don't give a fuck to say

Fuck the police (4X)

Police, open now. We have a warrant for Eazy-E's arrest.
Get down and put your hands up where I can see em.
Just shut the fuck up and get your muthafuckin ass on the floor.
[huh?]

And tell the jury how you feel about this bullshit.

I'm tired of the muthafuckin jackin
Sweatin my gang while I'm chillin in the shackin
Shining tha light in my face, and for what
Maybe it's because I kick so much butt

I kick ass, or maybe cuz I blast
On a stupid assed nigga when I'm playin with the trigga
Of any Uzi or an AK
Cuz the police always got somethin stupid to say

They put up my picture with silence
Cuz my identity by itself causes violence
The E with the criminal behavior
Yeah, I'm a gansta, but still I got flavor

Without a gun and a badge, what do ya got?
A sucka in a uniform waitin to get shot,
By me, or another nigga.
and with a gat it don't matter if he's smarter or bigger
[MC Ren: Sidle him, kid, he's from the old school, fool]

And as you all know, E's here to rule
Whenever I'm rollin, keep lookin in the mirror
And there's no cue, yo, so I can hear a
Dumb muthafucka with a gun

And if I'm rollin off the 8, he'll be tha one
That I take out, and then get away
And while I'm drivin off laughin
This is what I'll say

Fuck the police (4X)

The jury has found you guilty of bein a redneck,
Whitebread, chickenshit muthafucka.
Wait, that's a lie. That's a goddamn lie.
I want justice! I want justice!
Fuck you, you black muthafucka!

Fuck the police (3X)

Appendix C – Public Enemy ‘Fear of a Black Planet’

Man you ain't gotta
Worry 'bout a thing
'Bout your daughter
Nah she ain't my type
(But supposin' she said she loved me)
Are you afraid of the mix of Black and White
We're livin' in a land where
The law say the mixing of race
Makes the blood impure
She's a woman I'm a man
But by the look on your face
See ya can't stand it

Man calm your ass down don't get mad
I don't your sistah
(But supposin' she said she loved me)
Would you still love her
Or would you dismiss her
What is pure? Who is pure?
Is it European state of being, I'm not sure
If the whole world was to come
Thru peace and love
Then what would we made of?

Excuse us for the news
You might not be amused
But did you know white comes from Black
No need to be confused

Excuse us for the news
I question those accused
Why is this fear of Black from White
Influence who you choose?

Man c'mon now, I don't want your wife
Stop screamin' it's not the end of your life
(But supposin' she said she loved me)
What's wrong with some color in your family tree
I don't know

I'm just a rhyme sayer
Skins protected 'gainst the ozone layers
Breakdown 2001
Might be best to be Black
Or just Brown countdown

I've been wonderin' why
People livin' in fear
Of my shade
(Or my hi top fade)
I'm not the one that's runnin'
But they got me one the run
Treat me like I have a gun
All I got is genes and chromosomes

Consider me Black to the bone
All I want is peace and love
On this planet
(Ain't that how God planned it?)

Excuse us for the news
You might not be amused
But did you know White comes from Black
No need to be confused

Excuse us for the news
I question those accused
Why is this fear of Black from White
Influence who you choose?

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