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Edutainment: A Sociological Study of Rap As Social Theory

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By

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This is for my Babies and anyone else I had to ignore to write it…
And Alison.
Thank you for understanding what I was trying to say, even when I sometimes didn't.

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Introduction

The genre of rap music has long been used by men and women of color to provide a glimpse into the inner workings of the social systems that govern their lives and impact their environments. This meaning making through music is a practice that dates back to slavery and negro spirituals, which later gaveway to Blues.[1] The culture of Hip Hop follows in that tradition. Whether based on lived experiences or second hand accounts told in first person narratives, these five minute stories set to beats became a window into the struggles of growing up at the intersection of being a minority and being poor in the United States. Geography, or where a rapper hailed from, often provided the context for how sense was made of the spaces they inhabited. Rappers from New York, where the culture was centered until the mid 1980s, spoke on life in the five boroughs, while California rappers addressed life in Los Angeles once the culture had migrated west. Party and braggadocious style rap songs helped fuel the music's popularity throughout the early 1980s, and still today; however, the music begin to shift in 1988 when artists and groups like California's Ice T and NWA; and New York's Public Enemy and KRS One began to openly and defiantly question the oppressive systems and policies they believed held Blacks and other minorities in inferior social positions. These new artists would create two distinct subgenres of hip hop. Conscious Rap and Gangster Rap. As these genres grew alongside one another they gave birth to artists like 2Pac and Nas, and groups such as Compton's Most Wanted and Brand Nubian, and later, Wu Tang

[1] Sojoyner, Damien M. 2016. *First Strike : Educational Enclosures in Black Los Angeles*. University of Minnesota Press. p. xiii-xv.

Clan, all of whom gave accounts of the daily struggles of the ghetto poor. The period came to be known as the Golden Age of Hip Hop.[2]

During the Golden Age of Hip Hop (GAHH), many artists from the east and west coast were influenced by four different social organizations. For New York rappers those organizations were the *Nation of Islam* (NOI) and the *5 Percent Nation of Gods and Earths* (NOGE), and for rappers in California, it was the *Bloods* and *Crips*. Unbeknownst to the rappers themselves, but in the way in which they were identifying, analyzing and making assessments about issues like race and the over-criminalization of people of color, amounted to social theory. That theory was based on their observations and experiences, and shaped by the social networks and systems they came into contact with.

What follows is a theoretical analysis of a sample of songs released between 1987 and 1995–a period known as Hip Hop's golden age–that were categorized into the sub-genres of *Conscious Rap* and *Gangsta Rap* by the media. Despite being placed into separate categories because of the differences in how they addressed social matters, early conscious and gangster rap were similar in the way they were critical of the structure of American society and the place people of color occupy within that society. In what ways were rappers discussing the social systems under which they lived and why? How did their environments shape their music? What can we learn from artists and their proximity to racial disparities? My hope is that, in answering these questions, this study leads to further discussion around the value of rap music both as social theory and as a tool that can be used to raise consciousness of all, about the

[2] Johnson, Antoine S. "Golden-Era Rap Music and the Black Intellectual Tradition." African American Historical Institute Society. August 23, 2023.
https://www.aaihs.org/golden-era-rap-music-and-the-black-intellectual-tradition/

lived experiences of people of color from their perspectives. My wish is that I have provided the people represented in the music, as well as those who may not understand it, new lenses through which to view the Black experience in this country.

Social Theory

> "Caught in the middle and Not surrenderin'/I don't rhyme for the sake of of riddlin.'"
> -Chuck D (1988).[3]

The easiest way I have found to describe social theory is that it seeks to explain how the world (i.e; people and their networks of relationships) works. It is a systematic theoretical thinking, relevant to particular substantive problems or questions of who, what, when, where and why.[4] When it comes to analyzing data, the *Oxford Dictionary of the Social Sciences* explains of theory, "Some want high reliability and closeness to the data. Some want elegance and parsimony, explaining as much as possible on a narrow base of assumption. Others want synthesis, bringing the maximum range of knowledge into one framework, even at the expense of parsimony. Finally, some want social theory to be as objective as possible, while others want it to be engaged in changing the world."[5] These descriptions lay out several criteria on which to base the value of social theory, but the test lies in whether or not assessments are based on empirical evidence–information acquired by observation or through experimentation. Biases and assumptions are less valuable because they tend to be based on opinion and only serve to tell half truths or get the story wrong altogether. Through the process of collecting and analyzing empirical evidence, sociologists examine the functions of

[3] Public Enemy, 1988. *Don't Believe the Hype.*
[4] Whetten, David A. 1989: What Constitutes a Theoretical Contribution?. *AMR,* 14, 490–495, https://doi.org/10.5465/amr.1989.4308371. December 4, 2023.
[5] *Dictionary of the Social Sciences*, edited by Calhoun, Craig. : Oxford University Press, 2002. https://www.oxfordreference.com/view/10.1093/acref/9780195123715.001.0001/acref-9780195123715 April 29, 2024.

societies and the people or social groups within them. Identifying phenomena and discovering ways to explain them is social theory.

While not sociologists, rappers also create a form of social theory when analyzing and ascribing causal claims to the social networks and systems that impact their lives and communities. In his essay titled “They Killin’ Us for No Reason”: Black Lives Matter, Police Brutality, and Hip-Hop Music,” Dante Mozie explains that rap has “a strong undercurrent of critical social and political commentary, offering messages of resistance and empowerment.”[6] It is “an assertive form of political consciousness that responds to, and resists oppression.” Rap has long been considered social commentary on urban life; however, rappers started to take the practice a step further during the GAHH. More than just reporting on issues facing poor people of color, rappers began offering detailed accounts of their lived experiences and critically thinking about the forces responsible for them. These theories were not academic in nature, but they gave accounts from a perspective most academics could not because they were rarely actors in the social worlds that perpetuated the poverty and racial inequalities artists experienced. As actors in the very systems and patterns they sought to analyze, rappers were in the best position to offer detailed accounts of these social systems.[7]

Two theories help describe the creation of social theory from the vantage point of rappers, the first of which is Standpoint Theory. Developed by Sandra Harding and expanded by such Black feminist thinkers as Patricia Hill Collins, Standpoint Theory is

[6] Mozie, D. (2022). “They Killin’ Us for No Reason”: Black Lives Matter, Police Brutality, and Hip-Hop Music—A Quantitative Content Analysis. Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly, 99(3), 826-847. https://doi.org/10.1177/10776990221109803 April 25, 2024.
[7] ibid.

concerned with the various levels of people's perceptions.[8] Here, Megan Halpern explains, "The basic principles of the theory are that (a) all knowledge is situated, interpreted, and thus local; and (b) those belonging to marginalized groups are situated in ways that allow them to see more than those who are not. This means that not only do we see things differently from different perspectives, but that those who are outside of the dominant perspective have access to knowledge that those within it do not."[9] Put more simply, those most affected by circumstances are often in the best position to explain them.

The second theory that helps explain the theory produced in rap is Vernacular Theory. The term was created by Houston Baker to describe strategies for understanding the Blacks experience in the United States, through the genre of blues.[10] Thomas McLaughlin argues Bakers' take on vernacular theory in his *Street Smarts and Critical Theory.*[11] According to Baker and McLaughlin, there are two aspects to the term vernacular, both of which are relevant to this study. The first refers to the Latin definition of the word which means "language of slaves," and the second meaning deals with the "localness of those slaves."[12] McLaughlin claims that vernacular theory would never think of itself as theory and is mostly unaware the discipline exists.[13] McLaughlin writes of vernacular theory:

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[8] Halpern, Megan. Feminist Standpoint Theory and science communication. Journal of Scientific Communication, Volume 18 • Issue 04 • 2019. https://jcom.sissa.it/article/pubid/JCOM_1804_2019_C02/ April 28, 2024.
[9] ibid.
[10] McLaughlin, Thomas. 1996. *Street Smarts and Critical Theory. [Electronic Resource] : Listening to the Vernacular*. Wisconsin Project on American Writers. University of Wisconsin Press. https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=cat03691a&AN=bard.b2734437&site=eds-live&scope=site. April 24, 2024.
[11] ibid
[12] Ibid
[13] ibid

> It refers to the practices of those who lack the cultural power and speak a critical language grounded in local concerns, not the language spoken by academic elites. They do not make use of the language or analytical strategies of academic theory; they devise a language and strategy appropriate to their own concerns. And they arise out of intensely local issues that lead to fundamental theoretical questions.[14]

This layperson's theory does not concern itself with traditional modes of the discipline, rather it is confined to those informal spaces where individuals have little more than experience to rely on when making meaning of their lives. Together, Standpoint Theory and Vernacular Theory provide the lenses through which we should view hip hop. They help to explain the perspectives that foster rapper's theories, as well as give them a home outside of formal discourses.

Background

A New York State of Mind:

"The solution? Knowledge of self, to better ourself, 'cause I know myself, that we can live much better than this"

-Grand Puba (1990)[15]

Hip hop was born out of the slums of early 1970s Bronx, New York. Almost two decades prior, urban planner Robert Moses disrupted one of the most racially diverse communities in the country when construction began on the Cross Bronx Expressway in 1948.[16] Slicing through the middle of the south Bronx, the highway's construction demolished hundreds of apartment buildings along its seven mile stretch through the borough, directly displacing over 60,000 residents.[17] Neighborhoods that once saw large populations of Jewish, Irish and Italian families, were now home to mostly Puerto Rican

[14] Ibid. p. 5-6,
[15] Brand Nubian. 1990. *Wake Up.*
[16] Susaneck, Adam Paul. "Segregation by Design." *TU Delft Centre for the Just City,* 2024. *https://www.segregationbydesign.com/* March 27, 2024.
[17] ibid.

and Black ones.[18] As the Cross Bronx Expressway tore through the Bronx property values plummeted, sending white residents fleeing to the suburbs. Black and Brown residents remained because of limited options. Public housing sprung up across the Bronx in the wake of this white flight and by the mid 1970s unemployment had dropped to 60%.[19] The average income per capita was just $2,430.[20] This was the breeding ground for a culture that would later spread around the world and come to be known as Hip Hop.

Although the term hip hop is most closely associated with the music, the culture of Hip Hop is comprised of four or five elements depending on who you ask. These are MCing, DJing, graffiti and breakdancing.[21] The fifth element, pushed by hip hop purists and pioneers such as Afrika Bambata and KRS One, is knowledge, or an awareness of hip hop history and culture.[22] Knowledge as an element of hip hop is important because it emphasizes the connection between the culture and the Nation of Islam and a breakaway sect of the religion called the 5% Nation of Gods and Earths.[23] Knowledge, or the acquisition of knowledge to combat the educational, economical and racial disparities in marginalized communities are key tenets of both religions. In that way it is difficult to overstate the influence Malcolm X's Black nationalist views have had on New

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[18] ibid.
[19] Chang, Jeff. 2005. *Can't Stop, Won't Stop: A History of the Hip-Hop Generation.* St. Martin's Press. Everand. https://www.everand.com/read/182523426/Can-t-Stop-Won-t-Stop-A-History-of-the-Hip-Hop-Generation. p. 30.
[20] ibid
[21]Rock The Bells Staff. "Breaking Down The 5 Elements Of Hip-Hop." Rock the Bells. August 24, 2021 https://rockthebells.com/articles/elements-of-hip-hop/ April 2, 2024.
[22] Dumitru, Eduard Stefan; Tudor, Virgil. "The Evolution of Hip Hop Culture," Research and Science. (2022): 223-238. https://heinonline.org/HOL/Page?collection=journals&handle=hein.journals/rescito24&id=230&men_tab=srchresults# April 2, 2024.
[23] Most Gods and Earths may disagree with their nation being referred to as a religion, rather than a way of life. I only address it as such here because of its association with Islam.

York rappers and the culture of Hip Hop. This is mainly because the two men who would go on to help shape the early conscious growth of the culture, were students of Malcolm X and his Mosque No. 7: NOGE founder Clarence 13 X and Louis Farrakhan, who has been the leader of the NOI since 1978.

The 5% Nation of Gods and Earths was founded in Harlem in October of 1964 by Clarence Edwards Smith.[24] As a member of Elijah Muhammed's Nation of Islam, and a student of Malcom X's Mosque No.7 in Harlem, the newly christened Clarence 13 X would leave the NOI after three years, over doctrinal differences, taking with him the his own understanding of the NOI's *Supreme Wisdom Lessons*, the lessons taught to Elijah Muhammed by Master Fard Muhammed. The former NOI student would reinterpret those lessons for the youth of New York City[25] Clarence 13X, or Allah the Father as he is sometimes referred to, believed that Black men were Gods and Black women were symbolic to the earth.[26] He taught Black youth the truth was that their identity was of a divine nature, because of their connection to Africa and the cradle of civilization. This connection to God was realized through *Knowledge of Self,* which included the meaning of civilization, righteousness, an understanding of themselves, and the science of everything in life.[27] The result was meant to enlighten Blacks to all there was to know about themselves and the world through the process of acquiring knowledge of self. Widely considered one of the greatest rappers of all time, Rakim describes Allah's teachings in his group's song *Move the Crowd:* "With knowledge of self it's nothing I

[24] Johnson, Christopher. 2006. "God, the Black Man and the Five Percenters." News & Notes. NPR. https://www.npr.org/2006/08/04/5614846/god-the-black-man-and-the-five-percenters. April 7, 2024.
[25] Quan, Jay. "The 5 Percent Nation's Impact On Hip Hop's Golden Era." Rock The Bells. February 11, 2021. https://rockthebells.com/articles/the-5-percent-nation-impact-on-the-golden-era-of-hip-hop/. December 2, 2024.
[26] Andrews, Pamela M. 2013. *Ain't no spook god: religiosity in the nation of gods and earths.* Masters thesis, Memorial University of Newfoundland. https://research.library.mun.ca/10088/ February 19, 2024.
[27] ibid.

can't solve. At 360 degrees I revolve. This an actual fact, it's not an act it's been proven"[28] This self actualization also placed upon each "God," a duty to teach eighty-fivers, other people of color deemed deaf, dumb and blind to reality, how to acquire knowledge of themselves.[29] Many begin to see Allah's teachings as a way of life and as the nation grew in tandem with hip hop throughout the 70s and 80s, it would come to have a deep impact on the culture.

As the consciousness of those creating hip hop grew, so did the consciousness in their music. Party rhymes and rapper's braggadocious tales still ruled the day, but the music began to shift in 1987, with the emergence of several rap groups and their debut releases. Long Island based Public Enemy's *Yo, Bum Rush the Show*[30], Bronx crew Boogie Down Productions' *Criminal Minded*[31] and Queens and Long Island duo Eric B and Rakim's *Paid in Full*,[32] would usher in a new political style of rap that not only documented life in New York's ghettos, it was critical of those they accused of creating them. With the introduction of these groups into the still young rap game, the music also became more oriented around skills. Rappers began to be celebrated just as much for what they said, as how they said it. This would mark the beginning of conscious rap.

The more complex rapper's word play became, the more they found creative ways to address social issues like the perils of crime, Afrocentricity and drug use. In their article "Hip Hop's Golden Age: A Retrospective On the Genres Most Influential Decade," online magazine HHGA describes the Golden age of Hip Hop as "a period in the genre's

[28] Eric B and Rakim. 1987. *Move the Crowd.*
[29] 120 Lessons Supreme Wisdom by Elijah Muhammad Lesson Corrections by the Father Allah. https://www.scribd.com/doc/216436644/120-Lessons-Supreme-Wisdom-by-Elijah-Muhammad-Lesson-Corrections-by-the-Father-Allah December 29, 2023.
[30] February 10th
[31] March 3rd
[32] July 7th

history that's widely regarded as its most important and influential. It spans from the mid-1980s to the mid-1990s, a time when Hip Hop experienced explosive growth and creativity. The golden age was marked by the emergence of many new artists and sub-genres, including gangsta rap, conscious rap, and alternative Hip Hop."[33] Rappers took on names like Wise Intelligent, KRS One,[34] Big Daddy Kane[35] and Large Professor, which reflected how they saw themselves or were nods to their connection to the NOI or NOGE. Some of these artists stop wearing gold chains, choosing instead to sport Black medallions, signaling their Black consciousness.

To Live and Die in L.A:

"My game ain't knowledge, my game's fear/I've no remorse so squares beware."

-Ice T (1987).[36]

As hip hop was enjoying success on the east coast with its evolution into consciousness, during the late 80s a different kind of social organization was influencing the music beginning to come out of the west, mainly Los Angeles. These influences took the form of the Bloods and Crips gangs, which pushed a lifestyle that was unlike the one of self-actualization coming out of music in New York. The youth of California were being impacted by the war between the two gangs and saw themselves more as Gangsters rather than Gods. A fact reflected in early rap coming out of California.

While gangs were present in California prior to the creation of the social organizations established during The Black Power Movement, these groups unified

[33] Hip Hop's Golden Age: A Retrospective On The Genre's Most Influential Decade. August 11, 2023. https://hiphopgoldenage.com/hip-hops-golden-age-a-retrospective-on-the-genres-most-influential-decade/ March 29, 2024.
[34] KRS One: Knowledge Reigns Supreme Over Nearly Everyone
[35] Big Daddy Kane: King Asiatic Nobody's Equal
[36] Ice T. 1987. *Colors*.

gang members under fighting police brutality and the struggle for Black liberation.[37] With limited opportunities as the movement began to die, gangs became an attractive alternative for many youth. Before long, these former Black radicals and children of Black radicals, taking with them a willingness to use violence to defend themselves, started to form organizations based mostly on neighborhood allegiances. The Crips were created within this vacuum. Initially established to protect their communities from police and outsiders, these groups soon turned on each other. On a night in 1972 after a concert in Los Angeles, the Crips, founded by Raymond Washington, murdered Robert Ballou during a robbery.[38] Ballou was killed after he refused to give up his leather jacket and the incident would come to be known as the "Hollywood Leather Jacket Murder."[39] As a result, gangs from opposing neighborhoods united to defend themselves against the Crips. They called themselves the Bloods.[40]

As gangs swept through California in the 1970s, so did the closing of factories like Goodyear, Firestone and General Motors. More than 900 industrial facilities closed between 1980 and 1983, stripping away thousands of jobs from minority communities.[41] Bloods' O.G, Cle "Bone" Sloan, explains his gang's war with the Crips and how things got out of hand: "During the late seventies it slowed down because niggas started working in the factories. When they took the jobs away, shit started back up. Then

[37] Collins, Elizabeth. "The Complex History of the Crips and Bloods Rivalry." Grunge. March 31, 2021. https://www.grunge.com/370781/the-complex-history-of-the-crips-and-the-bloods-rivalry/. April 13, 2024.
[38] Krikorian, Michael. "The Hollywood Leather Jacket Murder: The Night the Crips Became Infamous." December 1, 2014 https://www.krikorianwrites.com/blog/2014/11/29/the-hollywood-leather-jacket-murder-part-one. April 11, 2024.
[39] ibid.
[40] Flores, R. D. *Crime and Justice International* Volume: 13 Issue: 9 Dated: October 1997. https://www.ojp.gov/ncjrs/virtual-library/abstracts/crips-and-bloods p. 6-9
[41] Bernick, Michael. "After Plant Closings: A Labor Day Story." Forbes. August 18, 2018. https://www.forbes.com/sites/michaelbernick/2018/08/28/after-plant-closings-a-labor-day-story/ April 2, 2024.

cocaine hit the streets and niggas were in it for real."[42] Upwards of 124,000 people were left unemployed in California's biggest city.[43] According to Blood's leader Bobby Lavender, who saw the effects of this, "Thousands of parents lost their jobs. Homes and cars were repossessed. People who had just started to become middle-class were losing everything and sinking down."[44] Gangs and crime stepped in to fill the void left by rising inequality and poverty rates. By 1983, 155 gangs and their 30,000 members had spread across Los Angeles.[45]

According to a January 19,1993 Los Angeles Times article by journalist Jesse Katz titled "County's Yearly Gang Death Toll Reaches 800," the turmoil gripping California went from 271 gang related murders in Los Angeles county in 1985, to surpassing 800 murders by 1992.[46] In the article Katz writes, "With gang imagery increasingly reflected in fashion, music, slang, movies and television, experts fear that street violence is becoming the basis of a new antisocial subculture–just as the peace movement, free love and hallucinogenic drugs helped form the subculture of the 1960s."[47] By the time hip hop got to Los Angeles in the late 80s, the city was synonymous with gang culture and the music soon followed.

Gangster Rap was transported to California by rapper Ice T, who, upon hearing Schoolly D's 1985, *PSK, What Does It Mean?*, contacted the Philly rapper and asked for

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[42] Chang, Jeff. 2005. *Can't Stop, Won't Stop: A History of the Hip-Hop Generation.* St. Martin's Press. Everand. https://www.everand.com/read/182523426/Can-t-Stop-Won-t-Stop-A-History-of-the-Hip-Hop-Generation. p. 445.
[43] Ibid. p.445.
[44] Ibid. p. 445.
[45] Alonso, Alejandro A. 1999. *Territoriality among African-American street gangs in Los Angeles*. University of Southern California. http://www.alexalonso.com/academic/ALEX-A-ALONSO-1999-Thesis-complete.pdf. April 12, 2024.
[46] Katz Jesse, "County's Yearly Gang Death Toll Reaches 800." Los Angeles Times. January 19,1993https://www.latimes.com/archives/la-xpm-1993-01-19-mn-1651-story.html. April 12, 2024.
[47] ibid.

his blessing to use the style of rap Schoolly had employed on his song.[48] Schoolly D's *PSK* was an ode to his crew, the Park Side Killers, and the song is at times misogynist and violent, all the while documenting the rapper's gangster lifestyle. Although New York's version of gangster rap, Hardccore hip hop, also promoted themes of street life like violence and drug dealing, it was devoid of gang culture. Adopting Schoolly's style, Ice T recorded *6 In the Morning* in 1986.[49] The song was full of what Ice T called "faction," a blend of fact and fiction.[50] Things that really happened to him and his friends, but could not have happened within the time frame of the song. Although *6 In the Morning's* braggadocious raps detailed the rapper's gangster lifestyle, other songs by Ice T, such as *Colors* and *Squeeze the Trigger* began to be more reflective of the conditions in Los Angeles. These observations connected not only with gang members, but others who were ignorant to life in L.A. It would not be long before others began to copy Ice T's recipe for success.

If Ice T is responsible for importing Gangsta Rap to L.A, the rap group N.W.A would be responsible for exporting it to the world. Released on August 8, 1988, the group's debut album, *Straight Outta Compton*, was the pioneering record of the gangsta rap movement and would help give birth to this subgenre of hip hop. In Brian Clark's *It's Not About a Salary...: Rap, Race, and Resistance in Los Angeles,* N.W.A producer Dr. Dre explains their approach to the album:

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[48] Baker, Soren. 2018. *The History of Gangster Rap: From Schoolly D to Kendrick Lamar, the Rise of a Great American Art Form*. Abrams. Kindle. https://read.amazon.com/?asin=B07G7ZT93D&_encoding=UTF8&ref=dbs_p_ebk_r00_pbcb_rnvc00 April 12, 2024.p. 33.

[49] Ice T. 1986. *6 In The Morning*.

[50] Baker, Soren. 2018. *The History of Gangster Rap: From Schoolly D to Kendrick Lamar, the Rise of a Great American Art Form*. Abrams. Kindle. https://read.amazon.com/?asin=B07G7ZT93D&_encoding=UTF8&ref=dbs_p_ebk_r00_pbcb_rnvc00 April 12, 2024. p. 34.

> I wanted to make people go: 'Oh shit! I can't believe he's saying that shit.' I wanted to go all the way left. Everybody trying to do this Black power and shit, so I was like, let's give them an alternative. Nigger, nigger, nigger nigger, nigger, fuck this, fuck that, bitch, bitch, bitch, bitch, suck my dick, All that kind of shit, you know what I'm saying?[51]

Dre's acknowledgement of the group's desire to provide "an alternative " to the "Black power and shit," was a move away from the conscious rap movement also afoot in hip hop. The album was a window into more than just the gang life that plagued L.A. *Straight Outta Compton* captured the reality of the daily struggle of what it meant to grow up Black and in the ghetto, from the perspective of those who had lived it. Gangster rap was far removed from the conscious awakening happening in the east, with its style and notions of Black empowerment, but both movements were born of the same social conditions Blacks were experiencing all across the United States. However, where the teaching of the NOI and the NOGE promoted knowledge of self and Black unity, the reality of the gangster was full of violence and hopelessness as evidenced by Ice Cube on the song like *Gangsta Gangsta* and his famous line "Do I look like a mutafuckin' role model?/ To a kid lookin' up to me, life ain't nothing but bitches and money."[52] The album would go on to sell three million copies and firmly cement gangster rap as a part of the culture of hip hop.

Several different narratives of how Gangsta Rap got its name have been told over time, and all of them involve the term being placed on the music by the media. The most notable of these accounts is told by Sorren Baker in his book, *The History of Gangster*

[51] Cross, Brian. 1993. *It's Not About a Salary: Rap, Race, and Resistance in Los Angeles.* Verso. New York. (p. 197).
[52] NWA. 1988. *Gangsta Gangsta*.

Rap: From Schoolly D to Kendrick Lamar.[53] In it Baker attributes the naming of Gangster Rap to journalist Robert Hilburn, who wrote for the Los Angeles Times. In a 1989 article, Hilburn credits rapper Ice T with bringing about the notoriety of the "L.A gangster rap image," leaving Baker to cite this as "the first time the term was used in print."[54] The title was not popular with rappers, as most saw what they were doing as Reality Rap. N.W.A member MC Ren explains his sentiments: "The Gangster Rap title is like a division. I see a lot of cats embrace it like 'We do gangster rap,' but you probably can't find anything with me saying I do gangster rap or I did gangster rap. It's just hip hop to me."[55] Despite how rappers felt, the name stuck. Gangster rap now had its name and by 1989 the infant subgenre of hip hop had found its place in the culture.

Face the Nation:

"And then you'll come again, you'll know what time it is/Impeach the president, pulling out my ray gun/Zap the next one, I could be your Shogun."

-Chuck D (1988).[56]

While geography dictated what the youth of New York and California were being influenced by, the one thing none of them could escape were the racial undertones of the politics and policies of the three presidents who occupied the White House through Hip Hop's golden age: Ronald Reagan, George H. W. Bush and Bill Clinton. The three presidents all oversaw massive cuts to social programs like Welfare and after school programs, while simultaneously expanding prisons with policies that disproportionately harmed people of color. States soon took up the fight. President Reagan's "war on

[53] Baker, Soren. 2018. *The History of Gangster Rap: From Schoolly D to Kendrick Lamar, the Rise of a Great American Art Form*. Abrams. Kindle. https://read.amazon.com/?asin=B07G7ZT93D&_encoding=UTF8&ref=dbs_p_ebk_r00_pbcb_rnvc00 April 12, 2024. p.61.
[54] ibid.
[55] ibid. 61.
[56] Public Enemy. 1988. *Rebel without a Pause.*

drugs" is one such example. When Reagan introduced his war in 1982, crack had yet to hit the inner cities of the United States.[57] Even when the war was renewed during his 1986 reelection campaign, less than 2% of people polled saw drugs as an important problem.[58] That same year, in 1986, Reagan's Anti-Drug Abuse Act became legislation and would coincide with an influx of a new cheaper form of smokable cocaine called crack, into cities.[59] One year later, when convicted smuggler George Morales testified to a senate committee that the CIA was involved in a drugs for guns operation in Central America, Reagan claimed to have no knowledge of it.[60] The plot came to be known as the Iran-Contra affair and named as a source for the drugs funneling urban areas in the form of crack. Areas already dealing with poverty, poor schools and over-policing.

The Anti-Drug Abuse Act established mandatory minimum sentences for federal drug trafficking crimes and created a 100:1 disparity in sentencing between powder and crack cocaine.[61] Since crack mostly ravaged the urban communities of poor minorities, the law was applied unevenly to these Black spaces. An October 2006 study by Deborah J. Vagins and Jesselyn McCurdy of the ACLU titled "Cracks in the System: Twenty Years of the Unjust Federal Crack Cocaine Law" explains just how disproportionate the effects of these laws hit Blacks:

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[57] Alexander, Michelle. *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness.* The New Press. January 7, 2020. Everand. https://www.everand.com/search?query=the%20new%20jim%20crow. March 2, 2024. p. 63.
[58] Beckett, Katherine. 1997 *Making Crime Pay : Law and Order in Contemporary American Politics*. Studies in Crime and Public Policy. Oxford University Press. p. 25
[59] Chang, Jeff. 2005. *Can't Stop, Won't Stop: A History of the Hip-Hop Generation.* St. Martin's Press. Everand. https://www.everand.com/read/182523426/Can-t-Stop-Won-t-Stop-A-History-of-the-Hip-Hop-Generation. p. 301.March 13, 2024.
[60] Schneider, Keith. Iran-Contra Hearings; Smuggler Ties Contras To U.S. Drug Network. The New York Times. July 16, 1987. https://www.nytimes.com/1987/07/16/world/iran-contra-hearings-smuggler-ties-contras-to-us-drug-network.html April 12, 2024.
[61] The Sentencing Project. "Crack Cocaine Sentencing Policy: Unjustified and Unreasonable." Prison Policy Initiative. https://www.prisonpolicy.org/scans/sp/1003.pdf. April 12, 2024.

> In 1986, before the enactment of federal mandatory minimum sentencing for crack cocaine offenses, the average federal drug sentence for African Americans was 11% higher than for whites. Four years later, the average federal drug sentences for African Americans was 49% higher. In 2000, there were more African American men in prison and jails than there were in higher education, leading scholars to conclude that our crime policies are a major contributor to the disruption of the African American family.[62]

Soon states would adopt their own version of the anti-drug bill and Reagan presided over a boom in the kind of over-policing of Black communities that led the prison population in the United State go from 329,000 when he took office, to almost doubling to 627,000 by the time he left eight years later.[63] Although the increase in incarceration rates did not begin under Reagan, they would continue a sharp rise under his leadership and lay the groundwork for the trend to continue under the next two presidents.

George H. W. Bush would begin his racial politics before he became president. During the presidential campaign in 1988, supporters of Bush discovered his opponent Michael Dukakis had given weekend passes to convicted murderers during his time as governor of Massachusetts.[64] Convicted murderer Willie Horton had received one of these furloughs while serving a life sentence. On one such weekend pass Horton invaded the house of a couple, raping the wife and beating the husband for 12 hours.[65]

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[62] Vagins, Deborah J.; McCurdy, Jesselyn. "Cracks in the System: Twenty Years of the Unjust Federal Crack Cocaine Law" October 2006. https://www.aclu.org/wp-content/uploads/document/cracksinsystem_20061025.pdf. April 13, 2024.
[63] Cullen, James. "The History of Mass Incarceration." Brennan Center for Justice. July 20, 2018. https://www.brennancenter.org/our-work/analysis-opinion/history-mass-incarceration#:~:text=When%20Reagan%20took%20office%20in,then%20and%20remain%20so%20today. April 13, 2024.

[64] Youtube. "Willie Horton 1988 Attack Ad." https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Io9KMSSEZ0Y. April 13, 2024.
[65] Baker, Peter. "Bush Made Willie Horton an Issue in 1988, and the Racial Scars Are Still Fresh." The New York Times. Dec. 3, 2018. https://www.nytimes.com/2018/12/03/us/politics/bush-willie-horton.html. April 13, 2024.

Ceasing on the opportunity, the Bush campaign created the now infamous Willie Horton ad painting Dukakis as soft on crime and Bush as the person needed to protect Americans. The ad stoked the racial fears of White America as Horton face plastered over the ad served to ascribe a color to the problem of crime in America. The color of crime was Black. Bush was swept to victory, beating Dukakis in a landslide.[66]

During his presidency, when four L.A.P.D officers were found not guilty of the on camera beating of motorist Rodney King in 1992, Bush's response to the unrest the verdict caused in the streets of L.A, was to send in more 4,000 National Guard Troops, dismissing the protests as "purely criminal."[67] Stoking racial divisions even further was the killing of Natasha Harlins, by a Korean shop owner who accused the 15 year old of trying to steal a bottle of juice even though Harlins was later found to be holding onto the money to pay when she died. The shop owner received a $500 fine and probation.[68] According to a report from NPR, "At the same time, the community's anger was also deepening against Los Angeles police. African-Americans said they did not feel protected during times of need, but instead reported being harassed without cause. The LAPD at the time was almost an occupying force, particularly biased against people of color."[69] The disproportionate application of the law in both the Rodney King and Natasha Harlins cases would be all the proof minorities needed that racism was still a problem for Blacks in America, and their reaction was felt.

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[66] ibid.

[67] Nelson, Jack. "Bush Denounces Rioting in L.A. as 'Purely Criminal': White House: The President voices frustration at King case verdicts. He offers federal assistance." Los Angeles Times. May 1, 1992. https://www.latimes.com/archives/la-xpm-1992-05-01-mn-1416-story.html March 29, 2024.

[68] Krbechek, Anjuli Sastry. Bates, Karen Grigsby. "When LA Erupted In Anger: A Look Back At The Rodney King Riots."April 6,2017. (https://www.npr.org/2017/04/26/524744989/when-la-erupted-in-anger-a-look-back-at-the-rodney. March 19, 2024,

[69] ibid.

The five days of protest, beginning on April 29, 1992, ravaged the city of Los Angeles to the tune of one billion in property damage. When the smoke cleared more than 60 people had lost their lives, 10 of which were shot by law enforcement.[70] The racial makeup of those arrested was also telling. While 36 percent of those arrested during the riots were Black, 51 percent were Latinos.[71] The coming together of Blacks despite gang affiliation, with Latinos, to shut down the city of Los Angeles symbolized a power that was not lost on rappers, as Dr. Dre points out on *The Day the Niggaz Took Over*.[72] By the time Bush took to the airwaves, concerned that racial violence would spill over into different cities, it was too late. Blacks and Latinos in California were forcing the nation to deal with its racial skeletons.

Politics and racially biased policies would get no better for poor minorities under Bush's predecessor, Bill Clinton. Less than two years after assuming office, Clinton signed the bipartisan Violent Crime Control And Law Enforcement Act of 1994. The bill was, and remains, the largest piece of federal criminal justice legislation in U.S history. According to the Council on Criminal Justice:

> The Crime Bill imposed restrictions on the manufacture, sale, and possession of semiautomatic firearms; gave crime victims the right to speak at sentencing and parole hearings; expanded the federal death penalty to cover 60 offenses; put tens of thousands of additional police officers on the streets; prohibited the awarding of Pell grants to federal and state prisoners and created incentive grant programs encouraging states to expand prison capacity and toughen

[70] Miranda, Carolina A. Of the 63 People Killed During '92 Riots, 23 Deaths Remain Unsolved." Los Angeles Times. April 28, 2017. .https://www.latimes.com/entertainment/arts/miranda/la-et-cam-la-riots-jeff-beall-los-angeles-uprising-20170427-htmlstory.html. April 12, 2024.

[71] Krbechek, Anjuli Sastry. Bates, Karen Grigsby. "When LA Erupted In Anger: A Look Back At The Rodney King Riots." NPR. April 6,2017. (https://www.npr.org/2017/04/26/524744989/when-la-erupted-in-anger-a-look-back-at-the-rodney. March 19, 2024,

[72] On *The Day the Niggaz Took Over*. Dr. Dre raps, "Bloods, Crips on the same squad/ With the ese's helpin', nigga, it's time to rob and mob/And break the white man off something lovely/ I don't love dem, so dem can't love me." Dr Dre. 1992. *The Day the Niggaz Took Over.*

sentencing for crimes of violence.[73]

Under the Violent Crime Control And Law Enforcement Act, states were given incentives to build prisons, which made tough on crime laws particularly attractive. States soon passed legislation like three strike laws that allowed for youth to earn their first strike as early as middle school and quality of life crimes where an individual could be arrested for not possessing identification.[74] The crime bill signed by Clinton would also expand Reagan's war on drugs, locking up a disproportionate number of Black across the country.[75] This resulted in a prison population that significantly expanded from 100,250 federal and 1,025,624 state prisoners in 1995, to 145,416 federal and 1,236,476 state inmates by 2000, according to an August 2001 Bureau of Justice Statistics bulletin.[76]

As the crime focused policies of these three presidents laid the groundwork for states to enact legislation that ravaged minority communities, hip hop began to respond. They continued to respond as cuts to social programs and drugs further tore apart their communities. As sociologist Damien Sojoyner explains, "the removal of an economic infrastructure in tandem with the complete dismantling of the welfare state by Presidents Ronald Reagan, George H. W. Bush and Bill Clinton left the Black community in a state

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[73] Alexander, Michelle. *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness.* The New Press. January 7, 2020. Everand. https://www.everand.com/search?query=the%20new%20jim%20crow. May 2, 2024.
[74] Caldwell, Beth. "Twenty-Five to Life for Adolescent Mistakes: Juvenile Strikes as Cruel and Unusual Punishment," University of San Francisco Law Review 46, no. 3 (Winter 2012): 581-654. https://heinonline.org/HOL/Page?collection=journals&handle=hein.journals/usflr46&id=601&men_tab=srchresults. May 5, 2024. p. 595.
[75] Alexander, Michelle. *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness.* The New Press. January 7, 2020. Everand. https://www.everand.com/search?query=the%20new%20jim%20crow. March 2, 2024. p. 140.
[76] Harrison, Paige M.; Beck, Allen J. "Prisoners in 2001." U.S. Department of Justice. July 2002. https://bjs.ojp.gov/content/pub/pdf/p01.pdf. April 19, 2024.

of peril."[77] Out of this peril came the golden age of hip hop and the platform of rap music being used by artists to call out the racial disparities in the U.S that people of color were all too familiar with.

Methods

For this study I sampled songs from a period in Hip Hop known as the Golden Age, which many historians of the culture agree spans between the mid 1980s to the mid 1990s.[78] I began in 1987 because several albums released in 1987 and 1988 established the subgenres of hip hop under review in this study: Conscious Rap and Gangster Rap. While the exact years of Hip Hop's golden age is still a matter of one's personal opinion, a simple google search of the term produced several articles and essays proclaiming the era to have spanned from the mid 1980s to the mid 1990s.[79] According to online magazine, Hip Hop's Golden Age, the time was "a period in the genre's history that's widely regarded as its most important and influential. It spans from the mid-1980s to the mid-1990s, a time when Hip Hop experienced explosive growth and creativity. The golden age was marked by the emergence of many new artists and sub-genres, including gangsta rap, conscious rap, and alternative Hip Hop. The period also saw the rise of iconic artists like Run-DMC, LL Cool J, Beastie Boys, Public Enemy, KRS-One, Eric B & Rakim, Ice-T, N.W.A., De La Soul, A Tribe Called Quest, Wu-Tang Clan, Nas, and many others."[80] The cultural significance of the music produced during

[77] Sojoyner, Damien M. 2016. *First Strike : Educational Enclosures in Black Los Angeles*. University of Minnesota Press. p. 144.
[78] Hip Hop's Golden Age: A Retrospective On The Genre's Most Influential Decade. August 11, 2023. https://hiphopgoldenage.com/hip-hops-golden-age-a-retrospective-on-the-genres-most-influential-decade/ March 29, 2024.
[79] ibid.
[80] ibid.

the GAHH influenced my decision in choosing artists from this period as subjects for this study.

The only criteria for the songs sampled were that they fell within the categories of the conscious rap or gangster rap genres, as these artists were more inclined to address political and social issues like race, and the over-criminalization of minorities in their music. Using my own 40 year relationship with the genre as a guide, I chose artists who pioneered these spaces such as Public Enemy, Ice T and NWA and their social networks of other artists. Progeny of these pioneers. At times I learned of another rapper to research from their relationships with other artists. For instance, rapper Ice Cube is a former member of NWA. Ice Cube was later produced by Public Enemy and the Lench Mob, and the Lench Mob and Ice Cube have songs with Cypress Hill. These networks increased the sample size from which I had to choose. Other artists and their music were selected based on popularity (Nas), critical acclaim (Brand Nubian) and controversy (2Pac). This was done by cross referencing the most popular and critically acclaimed albums of each of the years listed in the study, and matching that list against a list of artists who were classified as either conscious or gangster rappers. Online magazine Album of the Year was key in my search, as it allowed me to search genre and year.[81] For instance, “gangster rap albums 1988” was a searchable term on Album of the Year’s website. I matched these albums with other best of lists like Rolling Stones’ “The 200 Greatest Rap Albums of All Time, which provided me with my sample”[82]

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[81]Album of the Year. (https://www.albumoftheyear.org/genre/317-conscious-hip-hop/1988/). November 19, 2023.

[82] Rolling Stone. https://www.rollingstone.com/music/music-lists/best-hip-hop-albums-1323916/public-enemy-it-take-a-nation-of-millions-to-hold-us-back-1988-1346599/. December 2, 2023.

Once I selected the sample of songs for the study, I coded them into categories based on the social problems addressed in them. When possible, I cross referenced these issues with both quantitative and qualitative data on the topics. The quantitative included statistical information on racial disparities, while the qualitative was used to compare rappers' assessments about these inequalities to what other sociologists have said about the same issues. I do not make the claim that rap artists were sociologists in the academic sense of the profession. I only argue that the assessments and claims being made in the music during the GAHH amounted to a layperson's social theory, which was based on rappers' own observations and lived experiences.

In the rare case when an artist had strong ties to another coast, we see a kind of hybrid rapper emerge. One equal parts conscious and gangster rapper. The cases of rappers 2pac and Ice Cube are two such examples. Born in New York and having moved to California as a teenager, 2Pac combined a Malcolm X style Black nationalism with California gangsterism. Similarly, after leaving NWA in 1989, Ice Cube relocated to New York to seek out the Farrakhan influenced Public Enemy and their in-house production team. The Bomb Squad produced his first solo album.[83] The result was not a complete transformation, but his songs began to reflect a new social consciousness. Ice Cube explains his shift in attitude on his song When Will They Shoot.[84] This slight move away from the gangster rhetoric of NWA happened after the rapper connected with New York's Public Enemy. These cases were important in understanding how geography and

[83] The Bomb Squad is Public Enemy's in-house production team.
[84] On *When Will They Shoot*, Ice Cube raps, "I met Farrakhan and had dinner/now you ask if I'm a 5 percenter?/Well no, but I go where the brothers go/Down with Compton Mosque, Number 54/Made a little dough/Still got a sister on my elbow/Did Ice Cube sell out?/You say, "Hell no!"/A black woman is my manager, not in the kitchen/So could you please stop bitchin'?" Ice Cube. 1992. *When Will They Shoot.*

the social systems native to them have influenced rapper's politics and how they discuss their environments.

It is important to note that while women may have been underrepresented in early Gangster Rap, they were not voiceless. Such female artists as Boss and Lady of Rage gave women a presence in gangster rap and on songs like *Deeper* and *Stranded on Deathrow* they also spoke on social conditions. For conscious rap; however, the story was much different. Women like Queen Latifah, Lauren Hill, LadyBug (Digable Planets), and others displayed consciousness in their music. Songs like *U.N.I.T.Y,* by Queen Latifah and *Where I'm From,* by Digable Planets found female rappers tackling social issues and signaling their affiliation with groups like NOGE.

Literature Review

Blacks have long used music to convey messages or to make meaning of their lives. The Blues is just one such example (Sojoyner 2016; McLaughlin 1996). Hip Hop also follows in that tradition, with rap music becoming a vehicle for youth to display their political consciousness and racial inequalities (Mozie 2022). Social theory is the name of the practice of systematic theoretical thinking relevant to particular substantive problems or questions in sociology (Harrington, 2021). Complete theories have also been described as having the four elements of: *what, when, how* and *why* (Whetten 1989). Rap as social theory can best be explained through feminist Standpoint Theory, which is concerned with the perspectives of people outside of the dominant spheres of knowledge (Halpern 2019). Vernacular Theory was developed to explain strategies for understanding the language of the Blues and is also useful in explaining Hip Hop as social theory. Much like Standpoint Theory, Vernacular Theory focuses on the

production of theory from those who lack cultural power and is grounded in local concerns (McLaughlin 1996).

The culture of Hip Hop was created during a period of racial and economic turmoil in the Bronx (Susanek 2024; Chang 2005). The four, or five, elements of the culture arose as a way for Black and Brown youth to escape the daily reality of poverty, crime and violence in the borough (Dumitru and Tudor 2022; Chang 2005). The culture of Hip Hop grew alongside the 5 Percent Nation of Gods and Earths and became heavily influenced by the breakaway sect of the Nation of Islam (Quan 2021; Johnson 2006). By the time the culture made its way to California, the city of Los Angeles was steeped in the gang ideology of the Bloods and Crips (Collins 2021; Alonso 1999; Katz 1993). These conscious and gang influences provided the landscape for hip hop being made during the Golden Age of Hip Hop.

Race:

Any rapper who steps in the booth to record has to be two people. The person they are and the person they are to the outside world (DuBois 1903). Minorities often contribute to the perpetuation of race and classification into racial categories by adopting along racial divisions (Fields and Fields, 2012; Omi, Winant, 1994; Anderson 1992). This; however, does not account for the real everyday effects of race that many Blacks experience. For instance, although the number of whites living in poverty is double that of Blacks and Hispanics, the poverty rate (the proportion of those living below the poverty line) among Blacks and Hispanics is almost three times higher than Whites (Alexander, 2020; Baker 2018; Bernick 2018; Desmond, 2012). Blacks make up close to 40% of the prison population despite being 12% of the country (Cullen 2018;

Alexander, 2012, Beckett 1997). Hispanics make up 14% (Bureau of Justice Statistics Jail Inmates in 2021 – Statistical Tables, December 2022). These disparities are daily reminders to people of color of their racial differences and scholars have written extensively about both the cultural and structural factors as causes for these divisions (Alexander, 2010; Omi, Winant, 1994; Desmond and Emirbayer, 2009).

Over-criminalization:

Social scientists have analyzed the notion that hyper-criminalization occurs along racial lines (Mozie 2022; Tomaskovic and Warren 2009; Vagins 2006; Harrison 2001). Negative personal experiences and secondhand accounts of peer's negative encounters with law enforcement fuel Black's distrust of the police, leading many to feel the laws are as unjust as officers are perceived to be (Rios 2011; Unnever and Gabbidon, 2011). Race in the criminal justice system in America has also been discussed in terms of systems of castes through which Blacks and Brown men and women are controlled (Alexander, 2020; Wacquant, 2001). These categories have aided in the creation of stereotypes around rap and its listeners perpetuating violence and criminality (Unnever and Gabbidon, 2011; Wacquant, 2001).

Discussion

The history of hip hop and the social conditions of the time provided the necessary context for understanding why these two distinct styles of music–conscious and gangster rap–were being produced. Thus, background was necessary to include in the study. It is important to note that I do not make the claim that the genres of music discussed here have died after the HHGA, or that they remained in the spaces that

gave rise to them. Rather, the study specifically makes the case that these sub-genres and artists were heavily influenced by the teachings and the ways of life espoused by the social organizations that had the most influence over their geographies. For New York and conscious rap it was the Malcolm X influenced, self actualization teaching of the NOI and the NOGE. For California and gangster rap, it was the ethos of the Black Panthers, turned inward, that created the Bloods and Crips. Just as none of these organizations remained confined to one geographical location, neither did music. And while these sub-genres preached two distinctly different ways of navigating society, they were being produced out of identical social conditions. The study goes on to make the claim that the discourses these rappers created around social institutions, rose to the level of social theory.

Race:

> Each block is like a maze, full of Black rats trapped,/Plus the Island [Rikers] is packed/From what I hear in all the stories when my peoples come back.
>
> -Nas (1994).[85]

Sociologists have long concluded that race is a construct. A response to "the theory and practice of applying a social, civic or legal double standard based on ancestry, and to the ideological surrounding such double standard."[86] In their book, *Racecraft: The soul of Inequality in American Life,* Karen and Barbara Fields point out that until the 17th century the idea of race did not exist.[87] In response to the growing need for more labor to produce cotton, sugar and tobacco did the concept come about, as justification for

[85] Nas, 1994. *New York State of Mind.*
[86] Fields, Karen. E; Fields, Barbara J. 2012. *Racecraft: The soul of Inequality in American Life*. London. Verso. p. 17.
[87] Ibid. p. 126.

the racism of the North American Slave trade. Thus, race was created as a justification for racism.[88]

The notion of race as a construct means little to poor minorities who view their race as the basis for their precarious social situations. According to the Field sisters, “From very early on, Americans wove racist concepts into a public language about inequality that made “Black” the virtual equivalent of "poor" and "lower class,” thus creating a distinctive idiom that has no parallel in other Western democracies.” This is the daily reality for most people of color and one that rappers began to think critically about during the GAHH.

For many rappers, race was the determining factor in why poverty and poor living conditions were concentrated in Black communities. On Da Lench Mob’s *Lord Have Mercy*, Short Dog raps, "The grass is greener, in my neighbor's yard/He's white, so his house is barred/up, by the windows and the doors/but my moms gotta clean his fuckin’ floors/They won't let us in (that's right)/Even if we learn to act just like them (word?)/But if you don't learn you flunk/on a road to sleep, forever on a jail bunk (all day)/But I ain't no punk, and I won't get punked/by the system, so I gotta diss 'em.”[89] The hopelessness in Short Dogs’ lyrics can best be described through James Unnever and Shaun Gabbidon’s African American Offending Theory, which makes the claim “that blacks have a unique worldview (or cosmology, axiology, aesthetics, cognitive landscape, collective memory) of the American social order that is not shared by whites and other minorities… “ and “this worldview has been shaped by racial dynamics largely outside of their control. Thus, our theory assumes that African Americans, unlike any other racial

[88] ibid.
[89] Da Lench Mob (Short Dog). 1992. *Lord Have Mercy*

group (e.g., whites) or other ethnic minorities (e.g., Hispanics), have a unique racial lens that informs their beliefs and behaviors especially as they relate to the salience of race and how racism impacts their lives in the U.S."[90] Short Dog's claim that his white neighbors enjoy advantages that his family does not. The "neighbor's house" can be viewed as a metaphor for social equality. He is doubtful that even if he learns how to conform, he would never experience life as his well off neighbor, because he is Black ("They won't let us in, even if we learn to act just like them"). The rapper acknowledges the consequences for not conforming as well when he raps, "But if you don't learn you flunk, on a road to sleep forever on a jail bunk." His feelings are in line with another argument that Unnever and Gabbidon make with Offender Theory, which is:

> Nearly every African American believes that they will encounter racial prejudice and racial discrimination during their lives because they are black. Thus, African Americans believe that they will not be treated as fairly as other races (e.g., whites) or other ethnicities (e.g., Hispanics). Put simply, they are aware that the playing field is not level; that is, they are aware that they will be discriminated against because of their race.[91]

All of these sentiments are captured in Short Dog's verse and are especially important because they mirror other Blacks' experience with race.

Where Short Dog is concerned with fitting in, other rappers have given up on the idea of conforming to society's standards. Too Short's Only the Strong Survive is one such example. In the song the rapper challenges the notion that one must follow a particular path to fit in with society. "I always heard that you gotta be strong, if you want to survive/Get your diploma go to college get a nine-to-five/Every year, you're makin 30 G's a pop/Workin see, and you're tied to the white man's jock/Movin out of the ghetto

[90] Unnever,James D; Gabbidon, Shaun L. 2011. *A theory of African American Offending: Race, Racism, and Crime*. Routledge. New York. https://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/bard/reader.action?docID=668809&ppg=4. April 24, 2024. p. 26-27.
[91] ibid. 27

cause it troubles you/Makin' payments on a B-M-W/I know you never would settle for the minimum snaps/Have to live in the ghetto where the blacks be at/And send your kids to a school that don't really teach/I give a fuck about a motherfuckin college degree, beetch!." [92] This was a sentiment echoed by many California rappers who come from gang influence. The idea that conforming to societal norms presents its own kind of prison is a feeling shared by several artists.[93]

Short Dog referencing his mother is not uncommon. Other artists have made songs which leaned heavily on their own mother's experiences to tell a story of many poor Black mothers. 2Pac's *Dear Momma* is most notable, but it is not alone. On *Wake Up,* Brand Nubian's Grand Puba examines what he calls "The heart of the problem." Among those problems are being locked into an inferior social position because of his mother's irrational belief in Jesus:

> Preacher got my Old Earth[94] puttin' money in the pan/For the rest of the week now I'm eatin' out a soup can/He has a home, drives his Caddy through town/Has my old earth believin' that he's comin' from the ground (Jesus)/Slain are those who fought for what was right/Slayed are those who fell victim to the pipe/A drug controlled substance, contained in a vial/Set up by the devil as he looks and he smiles/Good at the game of tricknology/But I have knowledge of myself you're not foolin' me/You see, the answer to me is black unity, Unification/to help our bad situation.[95]

As a member of the NOGE, it is not surprising that Puba would call out religion, but the rapper likens his mother's belief in Jesus to the crack epidemic mainly because its addictive nature causes his mother to neglect basic necessities, choosing instead to give her money to Jesus on false belief that one day "he's coming from the ground."

[92] Too Short. 1993. *Only the Strong Survive.*
[93] See: Ice T. 1991. *New Jack Hustler*. Also, Ice Cube. 1991. *Bird in a Hand.*
[94] mother.
[95] Brand Nubian (Grand Puba). 1990. *Wake Up!*

Black youth who have lost a parent to drug addiction can identify with the feeling of neglect that Puba raps about; however, it is his knowledge of self that he credits with keeping him from falling victim to the 'tricknology" he blames on whites.

Race and motherhood are also topics in Queen Latifah's *Evil that Men Do*, where she addresses another common theme in the Black community: lack of opportunity. Latifah does this through the lens of the single mother who is trapped in poverty because opportunities for things like housing are scarce. On the song Latifah raps:

> Situations, reality, what a concept!/Nothing ever seems to stay in step/ So today, here is a message to my sisters and brothers/Here are some things I want to cover/A woman strives for a better life, but who the hell cares?/because she's living on welfare/The government can't come up with a decent housing plan/So she's in no man's land/It's a sucker who tells you you're equal/[KRS-One] You don't need him, Johannasburg's crying for freedom!/[Queen Latifah] We the people hold these truths to be self-evident/but there's no response from the president.[96]

The issue Latifah raises around adequate housing for poor women is one Matthew Desmond addresses in work on evictions in Milwaukee. According to Desmond, "Many women in inner-city neighborhoods not only have smaller incomes than men, but also have larger expenses as well. Single-mother households make up roughly 58% of all African-American households in Milwaukee. Many cannot rely on regular support from their children's fathers to help pay for school supplies, clothes, food, medical care, and other expenses related to raising a child."[97] These problems often lead to eviction or "high levels of residential mobility, moving, in most cases, from one disadvantaged neighborhood to another."[98] Latifah believes the government is at least partly to blame.

[96] Queen Latifah. 1989. *Evil That Men Do.*
[97] Desmond, Matthew. "Eviction and the Reproduction of Urban Poverty." AJS Volume 118 Number 1. July 2012. p. 106.
[98] Ibid p. 88.

Although the woman has dreams of a better life, her poor social status has the woman in what the rapper calls, “no man’s land,” because it is a problem that escapes most men. As Desmond points out, “It is important to recognize, too, that single mothers, given their children, must seek out larger and more expensive housing options than noncustodial fathers, who can sleep on someone’s couch or, as was the case with my housemates, rent an inexpensive room.”[99] Latifah’s claim that “It's a sucker who tells you you're equal” is directed at the government, which she drives home by quoting the constitution, but the line can also be directed at gender disparities in the United States.

As a child, 2Pac grew up in close proximity to the Black radical struggle for liberation during the 60s and 70s. The son of former Black Panther Afeni Shakur and stepson to Black liberation leader Mutulu Shakur, 2Pac’s early work was defined by two forces: violent resistance to racial inequality and trying to make sense of it. Both of these dynamics were on full display in his music. He also has the distinction of being raised on the east coast before moving to California as a teen. This means the rapper has had the opportunity to view race from several different geographies and vantage points. On his song, *Point the Finger*, 2Pac asks a question that summed up his view on race: “It's not to be a racist, but let’s face this. Wouldn’t you if we could trade places?”[100] The “places” 2Pac is referring to are the inferiority of his Blackness with the inherent power contained in whiteness. He makes attempts to explain the causes of race relations in the country on songs like In his song *Changes,* when he raps*,* “I see no changes, all I see is racist faces/Misplaced hate makes disgrace to races/We under, I wonder what it takes to make this/One better place, let's erase the wasted/Take the evil out the people, they'll

[99] Ibid p. 106.
[100] 2Pac. 1993. *Point the Finger.*

be acting right/'Cause both black and white is smokin' crack tonight."[101] Here 2Pac blames "misplaced hate" for the "disgrace to races." His solution is to remove the hate, which he believes is due to the belief that most problems are uniquely black issues. He uses the idea that both Black and white people smoke crack to prove there is little difference between the races.

If Changes found 2Pac attempting to make sense of race and racism by appealing to the logic of those he feels perpetuate it, *Words of Wisdom* was the opposite. In this song the rapper challenges several "lies" about race that have made their way into popular discourse around the topic:

> This is for the masses/The lower classes/Ones you left out/jobs were givin'/better livin'/But we were kept out/Made to feel inferior, but we're the superior/Break the chains in our brains that made us fear ya/ Pledge allegiance to a flag that neglects us/Honor a man that refuses to respect us/Emancipation, proclamation, please/Lincoln just said that to save the nation. These are lies that we all accepted/"Say no to drugs" but the governments' keep it/Running through our community/killing the unity/The war on drugs is a war on you and me/And yet they say this is the "Home of The Free"/You ask me? It's all about hypocrisy/The constitution, yo, it don't apply to me.[102]

Here the rapper speaks of breaking the mental chains or ideologies of inferiority among Blacks that causes them to see whites as superior. The pledge of allegiance to "a flag that neglects us," the honoring of men like Lincoln who put an end to slavery only to save the nation, the war on drugs as a war on Black people and the hypocrisy of the constitution, which he feels does not apply to Black people. According to 2Pac, it is these lies that create the identities and ideologies that keep Blacks in positions of subjugation.

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[101] 2Pac. 1992. *Changes*.
[102] 2Pac. 1991. *Words of Wisdom.*

Although the concept of race is one constructed in response to racist practices of slavery, the effects of race and racism contain visual cues that serve as a reminder that race is real for those who experience it. Blacks make up close to 40% of the prison population despite being 12% of the country.[103] While the number of whites living in poverty is double that of Blacks and Hispanics, the poverty rate (the proportion of those living below the poverty line) among Blacks and Hispanics is almost three times higher than Whites.[104] These factors make it difficult for ordinary individuals to see past race, a point Unnever and Gabbidon explain in their African American Offender Theory. Rappers are no different, as many saw race and racism as a holdover from slavery and have chosen to use the platform of hip hop to think and speak critically about the practice.

Over-criminalization:

> "Instead of war on poverty/they got a war on drugs So the police can bother me"
> –2Pac (1992).[105]

Whether or not social control of minority communities through brutality and confinement was the ultimate goal of law enforcement and the criminal justice system, for rappers during the GAHH, this was undoubtedly the main function of these institutions. This is no coincidence. According to Victor Rios in his book *Punished: Policing the Lives of Black and Latino Boys,* "roughly 50 percent of the incarcerated population is Black, while it represents 14 percent of the total U.S. population. In 2007,

[103] Alexander, Michelle. *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness.* The New Press. January 7, 2020. Everand. https://www.everand.com/search?query=the%20new%20jim%20crow. March 2, 2024.
[104] Desmond, Matthew. "Eviction and the Reproduction of Urban Poverty." AJS Volume 118 Number 1. July 2012.
[105] 2Pac. 1992. *Changes*. .

about 16.6 percent of all Black males were or had previously been incarcerated; 7.7 percent of all Latino males and 2.6 percent of White males had the same status. The chance of a Black male going to prison sometime in his lifetime is one in three, compared to one in six for Latino men and one in seventeen for White men."[106] The ubiquity of the heavy hand of policing has been the topic of many rappers as they have sought to parse through their experiences, and the experiences of others, in their music. Although it was not the first song to portray the police as an occupying force in Black communities, N.W.A's *Fuck Da Police* (1988) would be the first time an entire rap song was dedicated to indicting cops for their over-policing of people of color. Complete with the willingness of the Black Power Movement to violently resist, the song challenged law enforcement in an openly threatening manner, making causal claims for what they saw as disparities in attitudes on policing Black youth. Citing such issues as race and jealousy on the part of officers, group member Ice Cube explains:

> Fuck da police coming straight from the underground/A young nigga got it bad 'cause I'm Brown/And not the other color, so police think, they have the authority/to kill a minority/Fuck that shit 'cause I ain't the one/for a punk muthafucka with a badge and a gun/to be beatin' on, and thrown in jail/We can go toe to toe in the middle of a cell/Fuckin' with me 'cause I'm a teenager/with a lil' bit of gold and a pager/Searching my car, lookin' for the product/thinkin' every nigga is selling narcotics/You rather see me in the pen,[107]/ than me and Lorenzo rollin' in a Benzo.[108]

Cube's assessment goes further than an observation. When he raps, "'cause I ain't the one, for a punk muthafucka with a badge and a gun/to be beatin' on, and thrown in jail," it is clear the rapper is explaining a process he is familiar with. He understands this

[106] Rios, Victor M. 1992. *Punished : Policing the Lives of Black and Latino Boys*, New York University Press. P.34. http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/bard/detail.action?docID=865849. Created from bard on April 21, 2024.
[107] Penitentiary
[108] N.W.A. 1988. *Fuck Da Police*.

pattern derives from his non-whiteness, which gives officers “the authority" to brutalize, arrest and even “kill a minority.” Ice Cube is aware that his age and appearance is negatively stereotyped, so officers expect to find evidence of criminal activity as his car is searched. Cube’s sentiments were correct, but they only told half the problem that arises when minority youth disconnect from law enforcement.

On *Niggaz 4 Life*, MC Ren mirrors Ice Cube’s sentiments, explaining police treatment leads him to brand himself with the title “nigga.” He starts by asking “Why do I call myself a ‘Nigga,’ you ask me?,” and then he explains:

> Because police always wanna harass me/Every time that I'm rollin/They swear up and down that the car was stolen/Make me get face down in the street/And throw the shit out my car on the concrete/In front of a residence/A million white motherfuckers on my back like I shot the President.[109]

Both Cube and Ren’s claims were not unfounded. Racially biased policing has its origins in the 1984 training of 25,000 state and local police officers by federal DEA agents, for what they called Operation Pipeline.[110] This training of officers from 48 states consisted of identifying potential drug couriers. Donald Tomaskovic-Devey and Patricia Warren write in study, “Explaining and Eliminating Racial Profiling,” “Jurisdictions developed a variety of profiles in response to Operation Pipeline. For example, in Eagle County, Colo., the sheriff’s office profiled drug couriers as those who had fast-food wrappers strewn in their cars, out-of-state license plates, and dark skin.”[111] Delaware developed a drug courier profile that “targeted young minority men carrying pagers or wearing gold jewelry.”[112] Therefore, when Ice Cube claims that his pager and gold

[109] NWA, 1991. *Niggaz 4 Life*.
[110] Tomaskovic-Devey, D., & Warren, P.. 2009. Explaining and Eliminating Racial Profiling. *Contexts*, *8*(2), 34-39. https://doi.org/10.1525/ctx.2009.8.2.34 .
[111] ibid
[112] ibid

makes him a target or MC Ren explains that he calls himself a nigga because he is treated like one, their evidence is experience.

These encounters with the criminalized helps to shape the culturally hegemonic view in most minority communities that police are bad. In his book *Streetwise : Race, Class, and Change in an Urban Community,* sociologist Elijah Anderson explains, “When law-abiding Blacks are ensnared by the criminal system the scenario may proceed as follows. A young man is arbitrarily stopped by the police and questioned. If he cannot effectively negotiate with the officer(s), he may be accused of a crime and arrested.”[113] Anderson points out that these incidents occur enough that Black youth are likely to know of many cases when “innocent” Black people are wrongfully accused and detained. Youth develop negative attitudes towards the police as a result of these encounters, and come to see the laws officers enforce as unjust as those tasked with upholding them. Disdain for the police and their practices was not confined to just one city or region of the country, as we shall see. After Fuck Da Police; however, artists in both California and New York began to produce songs that were critical of over-policing and its effects on minority youth and communities.

When addressing matters of harassment, brutality and the disproportionate application of law in marginalized communities, the music produced by artists coming out of New York was only slightly less violent than what their counterparts were making in California. Instead, in-line with NOI and NOGE teachings, New York’s conscious rap often attempted to educate, with violence taking a backseat. Groups like hip hop

[113] Anderson, Elijah. 1992. *Streetwise : Race, Class, and Change in an Urban Community*. University of Chicago Press. P. 195. https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=cat03691a&AN=bard.b1108386&site=eds-live&scope=site. April 2, 2024.

collective, Native Tongues,[114] Brand Nubian and Eric B and Rakim; and solo artists like Big Daddy Kane, Slick Rick, and Nas were never violent in nature, even though they have all made clear that they were not to be taken lightly. Rather, they employed a number of different creative methods to explain life in the ghetto. One of these methods was to connect the present to the historical mistreatment of minorities. The Main Source's *A Friendly Game of Baseball* and KRS One's *Sound of Da Police* are two such examples. The first finds the Main Source's Large Professor comparing the police brutality to America's pastime, claiming the brutality is normal to officers to be considered "A Friendly Game of Baseball." "Once a brother tried to take a leave, but they shot him in his face/Sayin he was tryin to steal a base/And people watch the news for coverage on the game/Hmm, and got the nerve to complain/They need to get themselves a front row seat/or sink a baseline for a beat/Cause television just ain't designed for precision y'all/It's just a friendly game of baseball.[115] Using this baseball analogy, Large Professor is able to explain how crimes are sensationalized through media coverage. His character attempts to run from officers and is shot. His "Sayin he was tryin steal base" implies the dead is accused of some wrongdoing. Because viewers do not have a "front row seat," the media's narrative prevails. He ends by warning that "television just ain't designed for precision, y'all." The rapper's story explains how crime is colorized through media in much the same way Bush's Willie Horton ad served to put a face on it crime.

[114] The Native Tongues crew was made up of groups Jungle Brothers, De La Soul, A Tribe Called Quest and Black Sheep; and solo artists Monie Love, Queen Latifah and Chi-Ali.

[115] Main Source. 1991. *A Friendly Game of Baseball.*

KRS One's the *Sound of da Police* can easily be considered conscious rap's response to NWA's *Fuck da Police*. Released in 1993, the song connects the experience of Blacks with the hyper-surveillance, harassment and brutality of the present to historical themes of slavery and racial inequality. He does so by comparing the word "officer" to "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 could 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/They both ride horses/ After 400 years, I've got no choices.[116]

In tying today's officer to yesterday's overseer, the rapper is describing a pattern that dates back "400 years." It is a pattern of hyper-surveillance ("The overseer rode around the plantation"), harassment ("The overseer could stop you what you're doing") and brutality ("The overseer had the right to get ill, and if you fought back, the overseer had the right to kill"), whose only real differences are the title of those tasked with administering the treatment. Later in the song when the rapper explains: "My grandfather had to deal with the cops. My great-grandfather had to deal with the cops. My great great grandfather had to deal with the cops, and then my great, great, great, great-when it's gonna stop?," he is giving an account of a long history that prompts him to pose the question, "when it's gonna stop?"

Many studies have tracked present day patterns of marginality and racial injustice to notions of Black inferiority that derive from slavery. This idea that newly freed Blacks would come to be socially controlled through the prison system is a case that has been

[116] KRS One. 1993. *Sound of da Police*.

made in film (Ava Duvernay's *13th*[117]) and has been the subject of many books and articles like Michelle Alexander's *The New Jim Crow*[118] and *Racecraft: The soul of inequality in American life*[119]; and L. Wacquant's "Deadly Symbiosis,"[120] to name a few.

Although he does not specifically mention race, it is clear why LL Cool J feels he is stopped by police in his song *Illegal Search.*[121] He is driving a nice car. This story finds LL being pulled over by the police while driving. LL's observations point to the split in how he views himself and his environment versus how the police and society may see him. LL raps:

> I call it nice, you call it a 'drug car'/I say 'disco', you call it a 'drug bar'
> I say 'nice guy', you call me Mr. Good Bar/I made progress, you say,
> 'Not that far'/I just started it, you're searchin' my car/But all my paperwork
> is up to par/It's in my uncle's name, so the frame won't work/Chump;
> illegal search.[122]

LL's understanding that there is a gap between how he sees himself and how he is seen by police is not new. These notions have roots in W.E.B Dubois' theory on "twoness" from his book *The Souls of Black Folk.* In the book Dubois explains twoness as a double consciousness, or this idea that Blacks have two social identities. Who they are to themselves and how they are in the eyes of others.[123] Despite explaining early in the song, "I drink champagne, to hell with Coors/Never sold coke in my life, I do tours," he is singled out by police who apparently see a criminal when they see the rapper. His "nice

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[117] Duvernay, Ava and Jason Moran, Jason. 2016. *13TH* . USA,
[118] Alexander, Michelle. *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness.* The New Press. January 7, 2020. Everand. https://www.everand.com/search?query=the%20new%20jim%20crow. March 2, 2024..
[119] Fields, Karen E, 2012*. Racecraft : the Soul of Inequality in American Life.* London ; New York :Verso, 2012.
[120] Wacquant, L. (2001). Deadly Symbiosis: When Ghetto and Prison Meet and Mesh. *Punishment & Society*, *3*(1), 95-133. https://doi.org/10.1177/14624740122228276.
[121] LL Cool J. 1990. *Illegal Search*.
[122] ibid.
[123] Du Bois, W. E. B. 1903. *The Souls of Black Folk*. New York. Knopf. p. 9.

car" in his eyes, has become a drug car in the eyes of police. His disco has become a drug bar. The social progress that LL has made is even discounted as "not that far." These themes are ones most Blacks have to mount constant fights against, regardless of who they are, as the rapper demonstrates.

LL Cool J's *Illegal Search* is notable for another reason. It shines light on an issue that rappers have identified as a precursor to getting stopped: driving while Black. As several of the songs sampled in this section point out, jealousy and racism were cited as some of the reasons artists gave for why they were pulled over. Data shows that even if the reasons why individuals felt they were illegally stopped and searched were wrong, the targeting of minorities in vehicles was real. In Explaining and Eliminating Racial Profiling," by Donald Tomaskovic-Devey and Patricia Warren, they explain, "communities suffering from higher rates of crime are often patrolled more aggressively than others. Because minorities more often live in these neighborhoods, the routine deployment of police in an effort to increase public safety will produce more police-citizen contacts and thus a higher rate of stops.in those neighborhoods."[124] Other factors also contribute to these disproportionately Black stops.Tomaskovic-Devey and Warren go on to explain:

> Once people are racially categorized, stereotypes automatically, and often unconsciously become activated and influenced behavior. Given pervasive media images of African American men as dangerous and Threatening, it shouldn't be surprising that when officers make a decision about whom to pull over or whom to search, unconscious bias may encourage them to focus more often on minorities.[125]

[124] Tomaskovic-Devey, Donald; Warren, Patricia. "Explaining and Eliminating Racial Profiling." Contexts, Vol. 8, No. 2, Spring 2009. pp. 34–39. http://ctx.sagepub.com/content/8/2/34. March 14, 2024. p. 37.
[125] Ibid. 38.

The blame for these disparities can be laid at the foot of Raegan's drug war, which statistics show, ultimately became a war on people of color and their constitutional rights.[126] Blacks and Latinos youth have especially borne the brunt of this over-policing. Ice Cube was 19 years old when he addressed police harassment and brutality on *Fuck da Police*. 2Pac was 20 years old when he made the claim, "The war on drugs is a war on you and me/And yet, they say this is the home of the free/You ask me, it's all about hypocrisy.[127] Whether New York or California, these rappers all tell a story of being disproportionately stopped, searched and jailed, often for no other reason than being Black. It is the story of an institution that systematically punishes people of color and their encounters with actors within that system have come to shape their views and how these problems are approached.

Despite the consciousness to come out of Gangster and Conscious rap, the downside is they perpetuate some of the same institutions they are critical of. Gangster rappers do not hide the fact that they operate outside of societal norms. Violence and informal economies are very much a part of such a lifestyle, which justify greater policing practices. Conscious rappers that draw influences from groups with racial identities such as the NOI and NOGE, and which exclude others. By separating themselves along racial lines, they perpetuate ideas of race. Although these strategies act as a defense for blacks dealing with racial inequalities, they also aid in preventing real change.

Conclusion

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[126] Harris, David A. "Driving While Black: Racial Profiling On Our Nation's Highways." ACLU, American Civil Liberties Union. June 7. 1999 . https://www.aclu.org/publications/driving-while-black-racial-profiling-our-nations-highways.April 17, 2024.

[127] 2Pac.1991. *Words of Wisdom*.

During the GAHH, rappers began a trend of creating social theory through their music. The period became notable for the social and political consciousness of the artists who emerged during the era, as well as the creation of several subgenres of Hip Hop to come out of the golden age. Conscious Rap was established by New York rappers who were heavily influenced by the Nation of Islam and a splinter sect of the religion called the 5% Percent Nation of Gods and Earths, which preached the unity and self-actualization of Blacks. In Los Angeles, youth, and Hip Hop culture, were influenced by the Bloods and Crips ideologies, from which Gangster Rap was created. The social organization that influenced these rappers' geographies determined how they addressed the institutions and systems they believed held Blacks to inferior positions in society. They tackled issues of race and the over-policing of minority communities, as well as a host of other social issues. Their theories were based on observations and personal experience. Their theories amount to social theory.

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