Remembering Black Consciousness Through Conscious Rap

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Submitted to the
Institute of Graduate Studies and Research
In partial fulfilment of the requirements for the Degree of

Masters of Arts
in
English Studies

Eastern Mediterranean University
May 2010
Gazimagusa, North Cyprus

Approval of the Institute of Graduate Studies and Research

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ABSTRACT

The main concern of this study is to suggest a new dimension to the debates concerning the rise and fall of conscious rap through two elements of African-American consciousness: the "veil" and "double consciousness". These concepts were first identified and discussed by the great American civil rights activist William Edward Burghardt Du Bois, who devoted most of his life to relieving the plight of blacks in a New World full of dominant white racists. His reference to the veil and double consciousness are grounded in the struggle that blacks have experienced because of the divisions of race in a country where institutionalized racism is implemented by the white authorities of America.

The double consciousness of being both black and American has created a self-identity crisis that has plagued blacks in their experiences in America, while the veil symbolizes the barrier that has prevented blacks from seeing themselves outside of what white Americans perceive them to be.

In conscious rap, there was a positive and progressive group of rappers who rapped to educate African Americans and to strengthen the African element of their double consciousness by bringing into black consciousness and the black community a sense of belonging and black cultural pride that had eluded them in white America. The dissertation ends with a discussion of the rise of gangsta rap, a genre of hip hop that has

contributed to the demise of conscious rap and its attempt to consolidate a black self-identity within the double consciousness of African Americans.

Keywords: Veil, Double Consciousness, Conscious rap, African-American.

ÖZ

Çalışmanın temel amacını; bilinç rap'in düşüş ve yükselişi tartışmalarına, Afrikalı-Amerikalı bilincinin iki boyutu olan '' peçe '' ve '' çifte bilinç'' üzerinden yeni bir boyut getirmektir. Bu kavramlar ilk kez hayatının büyük bir bölümünü Amerikalı ırkçılar tarafından şekillendirilen Yeni Dünya'daki siyahların sorunlarına adamış büyük Amerikalı sivil haklar savunucusu William Edward Burghardt Du Bois tarafından ortaya konmuştur. Du Bois'in ''peçe'' ve ''çifte bilinç'' kavramlarına olan yaklaşımı; Amerikalı beyaz otorite tarafından oluşturulan kurumsal ırkçılığın neden olduğu bölünmüşlüğü yaşayan siyahların yaşadıklarından temellenmiştir. ''Çifte bilinç'' kavramı; hem amerikalı hemde siyah olmanın yarattığı benlik krizini ifade ederken, ''peçe'' ise siyahların kendilerini dışardan beyaz amerikalıların algılamak istedikleri şekilde göstermelerini simgeselleştirmektedir.

Bilinç rap, olumlu ve gelişimci bir grup rap müzik sanatçısının; Afrikalı-Amerikalı toplumun, çifte bilincindeki Afrikalı kökenini; siyah bilinç, siyah topluma aidiyet, ve beyaz Amerika tarafından ellerinden alınmış siyah olmanın gururu ile bilinçlendirerek eğitmeyi amaçlamaktadır. Bu tez çalışmasının sonunda; gangster rap müziğini yükselişi, bilinç rap'in devamı olan hip hop müziği ve bu türlerin Amerika'daki siyah kimliğin Afrikalı-Amerikalıl'ların çifte bilinci ile güçlendirilemesini tartışılmaktadır.

Anahtar kelimeler: Peçe, Çifte bilinç, Bilinç rap, Afrikalı-Amerikalı.

This thesis is dedicated to my best friend, Raif Ozkaracan, who passed away far too early, I miss you so dearly, I wish you were still here mate, I will never forget you, may God be with you, always.

ACKOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to express my greatest gratitude to my supervisor, Dr. Francesca Cauchi, for her support and inspiration throughout my thesis. Her encouragement and supervision was without question the main reason why I continued and successfully completed a thesis that I can be proud to call my own. Her frequent demands throughout my research that I analyze rather than describe has taught me how to look below the surface of things and has made my thesis that much stronger. Without Francesca, I know that my thesis would not be as effective or as interesting as I would have liked. She has been not only the all-inspiring supervisor that I had hoped for, but more importantly I have gained a new friend, one that I will always look up to, appreciate and know that she will be there for me as a friend. I am also thankful to Dr. Rodney Sharkey for his suggestions prior to leaving Cyprus; the conversations I had with him in his office were often humorous but always encouraging. I would also like to thank the following Professors who sat at my thesis defence and provided additional suggestions to improve the thesis as a whole: Drs. Beauty Bragg, Skip Norman, Ravi Shankar and William Spates.

I would like to thank my wife, Berna Tosunoğlu Bilsen, my daughter Derin, who both provided and inspired me with the motivation to continue with my research and to complete my thesis. I would also like to thank my father, Hasan Hüseyin, my mother Gülay and my sisters Fatma and Ayşe for their inspiration and assistance throughout and for their full support. I am indebted to my colleagues in the School of Tourism and

Hospitality Management, all of whom have encouraged me to complete the MA sooner rather than later. Within this particular group of people I would like to especially thank Alper Güclucan, Nazenin Ruso, Raziye Nevzat, and Dr. Ruçhan Kayaman. It has been a long yet very gratifying experience; I would like to thank everyone that has assisted me in any way and hope I can be as inspiring to them as they have been to me.

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Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION

> Black consciousness is not sporting cowrie shells in your hair. Black consciousness is not listening to East Coast Hip Hop or Erykah Badu. Black consciousness is not dreadlocks. Black consciousness is not having read a few books by Black authors. Black consciousness is not a look or a fad. Black consciousness is an afrocentric state of mind. (Demaryl Howard)[1]

What exactly is black consciousness? According to the epigraph, it is "an afrocentric state of mind", but a brief look at the evolution of black consciousness in America will show that this is misleading because the consciousness of black Americans is both black and white, both African and American. It has no centre. In the history of black Africans in America there has been an incredible struggle to recognize their own consciousness because of the dual consciousness that was forced upon them as a result of slavery. When they were shipped out of Africa into a New World, black Africans were first stripped of both their history and culture and then dehumanized and exploited. This was the beginning of a black consciousness that was no longer purely African.

Decades after the emancipation of the slaves in 1863 and the continuing segregation of black Americans, a number of prominent African Americans were committed to creating an awareness not just of the African roots of African Americans but of their racial,

[1] "Back on Black Love: Whatever Happened to Black Consciousness?" (riverwestcurrents.org)

economic, political, social and cultural reality in America. People like W.E.B Du Bois, Booker T. Washington, Marcus Garvey, Martin Luther King, Malcolm X, Huey Newton, Bobby Seale, and Ron Karenga all in their own way provided a black consciousness for black Americans. This development of a black consciousness may not constitute a self definition for all black Americans, but it has certainly provided a deeper understanding of black history and culture and has served as a way to re-instil in African Americans a pride in their blackness and their African heritage and to remember the struggles of blacks in a racist white America.

W.E.B. Du Bois and Booker T. Washington, who were both early advocates of the civil rights movement, offered two different strategies to remove the discrimination experienced by black men and women in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Washington was a well-known black educator who considered that the best way for African Americans to achieve social integration was through an industrial education that would build on the skills and trades learned by the black slaves on the white plantations. Washington believed that through trade skills, African Americans would gain respect from the white community and have economic security. Unlike Washington, Du Bois, a scholar and activist whose ideas provide the basis of this dissertation, believed that an academic education was more important than a trade education. He argued that Washington's idea of industrial education denied African Americans the chance to reach a higher position in society, higher both socially and economically. In order to elevate themselves in society, Du Bois believed that African Americans should follow a European-style education (he himself was the first African American to be awarded a

PhD from Harvard University), which would of course also introduce a white European way of thinking. He also suggested that African Americans should involve themselves in American politics because by gaining this power they would be able to bring about change and improve the civil rights of the black race in America.

Although Du Bois and Washington provided the foundations of black consciousness in America for African Americans, the idea of being black in America and proud of it was inspired by Jamaican born activist, Marcus Garvey. Garvey became a mouthpiece for all black Americans during the years 1916 to 1922 when he gave public lectures in various parts of America. His main aim was to urge African Americans to be proud of their race and to return to Africa, their ancestral homeland, and his "Back to Africa" movement attracted thousands of supporters. Garvey helped to raise black consciousness that was still a mystery to many African Americans who really had no idea of their roots. To facilitate the return to Africa that he so longed for, Garvey founded the Black Star Line in 1919, a shipping company that would provide transportation to Africa. He also tried to persuade the government of Liberia in West Africa to grant land on which black people from America could settle. Although his efforts were unsuccessful and the dream of African American returnees remained just a dream, Garvey was responsible for developing an African consciousness within the African American consciousness.

Despite the abolition of slavery, the educational projects of Washington and Du Bois, and Garvey's inspirational public speaking, blacks in America were still demoralized and still felt they were part of a system that provided little or no sense of equality between black

and white communities. The civil rights movement between 1963 and 1966 was determined to expose this inequality and to protest against it. The key figures in this movement were Malcolm X and Martin Luther King Jr. These two voices, one militant the other pacifist, continued the work started by Washington, Du Bois and Garvey to raise black consciousness among African Americans who felt that they had as much right to feel American as white folk.

The fight for equality intensified after the assassination of black leader Malcolm X, and at the height of the civil rights movement led by Martin Luther King Jr., Huey Newton, Bobby Seale and David Hilliard founded the Black Panther Party for Self Defense, a political organization that was one of the most powerful movements for social change in America during the 1960's. It is the sole black organization in the entire history of black struggle against slavery and oppression in the United States that was armed and promoted a revolutionary agenda. It was a Marxist-Leninist organization that not only fought for equality, justice and freedom for blacks in America but for all members of the oppressed working classes. Another revolutionary African American figure in the 1960's was Ron Karenga who founded a black nationalist organization called Us. His major contribution to black consciousness however came from his philosophy called "kawaida" which was based on African ideas and culture and emphasized the importance of blackness in the self-identity of African Americans.

In the 1980's the task of developing and deepening black consciousness among African Americans was taken on by the conscious rappers, who are the focus of this dissertation.

Conscious rap provided a stage on which conscious rappers could educate their fellow blacks and help them to understand and appreciate their history, their culture and their positive place in the world. These conscious rappers, who were enormously influential during the golden age of rap among both black and white urban youth, all helped to create, nurture and remember their black consciousness with pride in an America that continues to oppress them through institutionalized racism.

Chapter 2

MUSIC AS AN EXPRESSION OF BLACK AMERICAN CONSCIOUSNESS

Music expresses that which cannot be said and on which it is impossible to be silent.
(Victor Hugo)

Although huge strides have been made in bringing black consciousness to the awareness of white consciousness[2], it has not yet produced a full racial reconciliation between black and white Americans. More importantly, black American consciousness has never been a fully African consciousness, although the roots of it derive from the "motherland". Black American consciousness began in the 17th century with trans-Atlantic journey which transported millions of Africans, uprooted from their homeland, and brought to America as slaves. Since their arrival in America, their African culture was lost and in order to hold onto it African-Americans created different forms of musical expressions that they called their own and that meaningfully narrated their experiences in this New World. Black musical expression is thus voice telling of the unjust and violent society in which African-Americans live and have always lived since the slave ships carried them from

[2] Barrack Obama was elected as the first black president of America.

Africa to America. This continuous line of black musical expression, that includes Negro Spirituals, Gospel, Blues, Soul, and Hip Hop, were created during very difficult and oppressive times.

Negro Spirituals, sometimes referred to as Sorrow Songs, are the earliest form of song expression by African Americans. Negro spirituals are defined as “Black religious songs that possess a lyrical quality and express a wide range of emotions including hope, pain, fear and joy" (Brooks, 8). Music, especially in the fields during long hours of physical toil, was encouraged even by the white Americans masters who noticed that the slaves worked harder and longer when they sang and that the music seemed to keep their spirits up. These songs were Christian as content as the enslaved Africans rapidly began adopting the Christian faith of their masters in order to deal with the overwhelming frustrations and agony of slave experience in the New World. The songs helped them to express a new faith so they could survive under such harsh and dismal conditions (Brooks, 9). As the slaves lived in a society in which separation of the races was at least the custom if not always the law, this segregation minimized outside musical influences and helped to preserve the unique musical characteristics of the Spirituals.

Another form of music that was rooted in the Christian faith and enabled the blacks of America to express their sorrows and despair was Gospel music. Gospel music began during the years following the Civil War (1861-1865). After the Emancipation Proclamation in 1862, slaves that were freed decided to seek a new life and to look for better opportunities, education and employment. The freed slaves also formed new

churches, some of which were affiliated to the Baptist, Methodist or Presbyterian churches (Boyer, 31). Unlike the slaves who sang Negro Spirituals, Gospel musicians felt that the Spirituals were a reminder of their former slavery and because they did not want to be reminded of this painful period of their history, they created a new form of black musical expression: "Hymns were combined with syncopation, call-and response, and improvisation of African-American music with the formal structure of the Christian hymn. These gospel hymns addressed the desires of African-Americans who wanted songs that more profoundly expressed their belief in the "Good News" found in the four Gospels of the New Testament" (Boyer, 37). In the late 60's, a new generation of Gospel music incorporated a new style to suit the popular music market. By exchanging choir robes for casual clothes and adding synthesizers, drum machines and other instruments to the performance, Gospel singers hoped to generate interest and gain the popularity of mainstream music. Although there are certain variations, such as solo performers and small groups, the dominant group consists of large choirs singing in churches, singing and hymning religious Testaments and making reference to the historical roots of African-Americans in the New World. This new generation of Gospel music included singers such as Aretha Franklin and Dionne Warwick, who have since entered the Hall of Fame of black singers.

Another form of black musical expression in the same time as Gospel was the Blues. Unlike upbeat Gospel songs, the Blues focused on pain and suffering. The roots of the Blues were various forms of African-American slave songs such as field hollers, work songs, spirituals, and country string ballads. This rural music captured the suffering,

anguish and hopes of slavery. The Blues provided a form of music that expressed the African-American spirit. More significantly, though it served as a form of social expression during a period in which, although slavery was abolished, African Americans were still facing oppression and were discriminated against by white Americans and their laws. "Blues is a reflection of the isolation of the Negro in American society, who was forced to live outside the dominant culture, developed his own culture and found within the difficulties and pain of his experiences the materials for a rich and vital music" (Brooks, 25).

Under the oppressive racial regime, Blues as entertainment made life more bearable, especially during a period that cost thousands of African Americans their lives due to the racial divisions. A famous song during the Blues period, "Strange Fruit", sung by Billie Holiday, explicitly voiced the bloody brutalism of white American racial hatred:

Southern tree bear a strange fruit,
Blood on the leaves and blood at the root,
Black bodies swinging in the Southern breeze,
Strange fruit hanging from the poplar trees.

Pastoral scene of the gallant South,
The bulging and the twisted mouth,
Scent of magnolias, sweet and fresh,
Then the sudden smell of burning flesh!

Here is a fruit for the crows to pluck,
For the rain to gather, for the wind to suck,
For the sun to rot, for the trees to rot,
Here is a strange and bitter crop.[3]

The "Strange Fruit" of the title refers to the bodies of African Americans Thomas Shipp and Abram Smith who were hanged during a lynching. Although the Emancipation Proclamation allowed slaves to be free, they still suffered racial persecution at the hands

[3]All lyrics cited in this dissertation have been taken from www.Sing365.com

of racist white folk. In common with Negro Spirituals, Blues songs were a way to keep the faith and maintain sanity, but above all they were about surviving within a racist society that had oppressed them since their first arrival in the New World. To cite late Mississippi blues man, Johnny Shines: "I'm proud to be called a 'nigger" – only niggers and oxen could have survived 300 years of slavery and racial oppression" (www.earlyblues.com).

After the Blues came Soul, which is defined as, a form of music that derives from both the Spirituals and the Blues. There have been a number of influential Soul artists including James Brown, Donny Hathaway, Marvin Gaye, Isaac Hayes, and Otis Redding. This period of "Classic Soul" is usually thought to include the 50's, 60's and 70's, a time frame that also included the Civil Rights Movement (1955-1968) and the monumental and far-reaching changes it brought about. These changes were reflected in the music and the culture of African Americans. As one historian notes: "This was a critical period in American history, in which Blacks struggled and with civil rights they marched, rallied and attended non-violent demonstrations but were almost always met with violent opposition. However, it was also during this period that Blacks were defining their own culture and pride" (Brooks, 151).

Soul music became a voice for black Americans and evoked a sense of black pride that had been lost in the long years of slavery and segregation. Soul songs like Donny Hathaway's "To be Young, Gifted and Black" instilled in black Americans a pride in their history and at the same time motivated a new generation to reach new heights. This

idea of Black pride was exemplified in James Brown's "Say It Loud – I'm Black and I'm Proud", which became an anthem for the Civil Rights Movement. The song's lyrics such as "I say we won't quit moving/ Til we get what we deserve/ we rather die on our feet/ Than keep living on our knees", were words of inspiration for those involved in the struggle for equality.

Although Soul music provided the "I'm Black and I'm Proud" motto that inspired African Americans with hope for a better future, especially after the Civil Rights Act in 1964, it did not place black struggle in America in a wider context. Consequently, a new form of political music was needed to create a basis for contemporary black expression. To meet this need, Hip Hop and rap exploded on the music scene. Hip Hop is defined as an urban, primarily African-American related pop culture that fully emerged at the end of the 1970's. Encompassing rap music, break dancing, graffiti, poetry, and fashion, it provides outside observers a portal into black experience. According to musicologist and rap scholar Tricia Rose, the most prevalent facet of Hip Hop is rap music, and the terms "rap" and "hip hop" have become interchangeable. Rose further argues that rap's origins stretch back to a centuries-old African oral tradition: "This tradition is exemplified by the West African griot, or storyteller. To the accompaniment of drums or other percussive instruments, griots entertain and educate their audiences by reciting tribal history and current events" (Rose, 53). It is, writes Rose, "the power of the rappers' voices and their role as storyteller that ensured that rapping would become the central expression in hip hop culture" (Rose, 55). We can thus argue that rap started out as a version of hip hop.

Rap emerged around the 1970's in the Bronx, New York. There is no single event that started rap music but there have been a couple of significant entrepreneurs of the rap phenomenon, one of whom was Pigmeat Markham, who recorded "Here Come the Judge", a song that reached 19 on the billboard charts. Later influences on rap included the Last Poets, who formed in 1969 and recited political poetry over drum beats and other instrumentation. Some critics have even suggested that the world-famous heavy-weight boxer Muhammad Ali was in fact the first genuine entrepreneur of rap. Pop culture critic Chuck Klosterman ponders: "if true, this would mean that rap did not originate in the South Bronx during the 70's: it would mean that rap was invented in Kentucky during the 60's" (Klosterman, 2). In his book, *Ali Rap,* author George Lois argues that "before there was rap, there was Ali Rap: "A topsy, turvy, jivey jargon that only Ali could create, but a language we could all understand" (Lois, 6). One memorable example of Ali Rap is: "You think I was shocked when Nixon resigned? / Wait till I whip George Foreman's behind / I done something new for this fight / I done tussled with an alligator! That's right".

There are many that disagree with the notion of Ali being the first rapper, but there is no doubt that through his rhyming and rapping there are many in his corner. Chuck D of rap group Public Enemy concurs with Lois and other music critics who regard Ali as a major contributor to the beginnings of rap insofar as he was able to rhyme cynically and creatively to show the problems facing both he and his social surroundings as a black man. Chuck D states: "He was able to engage (*sic*) his social surroundings into his whole persona. That's why hip hop was able to be an antenna for social reflection"

(www.publicenemy.com/index). One of the first rappers of the modern hip hop period was DJ Kool Herc, a Jamaican immigrant who started delivering simple raps at his parties. In a 1989 interview, Herc explained: "the whole chemistry came from Jamaica. I was listening to American music in Jamaica, and my favorite artist was James Brown. When I came over here I just had to put it in the American style" (Perry, 4).

Rap grew significantly in popularity during the 80's and no other rap group in that decade dominated as much as the three-man group, Run DMC. This group reached stardom with a number of rap hits such as "It's Tricky" and "Kings of Rock". But it was their 1986 hit song, "Walk This Way", which not only launched Run DMC into mainstream popularity but also initiated a revolution of hip hop culture within the mainstream media. Although the popularity of hip hop was emerging as unquestionably the most popular form of black musical expression, it was a type of rap called Conscious Rap that was heralded the arrival of a new generation of rappers. These rappers wrote lyrics that specifically concerned contemporary African-American communities and reminded the world that "Black is Beautiful" and that every black man should acknowledge, respect, and embrace the country where they originally hail from.

Conscious rap, sometimes referred to as political, social or message rap, emerged in the 1980's and remained popular throughout the 90's. This twenty-year period often regarded as the golden era of rap[4]. With its emphasis on education, self-improvement and black awareness, this style of rap encouraged black youth to learn about themselves, their

[4] Although conscious rap flourished in the 80's and 90's, and was forced underground by the arrival f (see also Chapter V), some notable conscious rap songs did break through into the mainstream in the first decade of the new millennium.

history, and how they could effect change in their community and the world around them. Conscious rap comprised a large, diverse group of rappers that provided a solid rapping style: "This style not only included hardcore, politically-minded artists and protest music, but also included a range of styles and philosophies, from Jazz-rap fusion to bohemian "peace and love" and "everything in between" (Ogbar, 74). Rap artists such as Public Enemy, Nas, Tupac Shakur[5], X-Clan, and KRS-One rapped over different musical styles, but all of them shared a common goal: to provide an arena for education and knowledge, and to acknowledge the uniqueness of the black experience. In her book *When Rap Had a Conscience*, Tayannah Lee McQuillar notes that that the story of Conscious Rap is "the story of how a group of talented, idealistic, confrontational, prismatic, and educated (self or institutionally) youth examined the world around them and not only reported their findings on wax but also explored why things were the way they were in their community and what could be done to correct the downside" (McQuillar, xvi). Among the many topics covered by conscious rappers are history, education, poverty and drugs. On Public Enemy's official website, lead rapper Chuck D declares that rap is the only way that black consciousness can be communicated to the black race of America. He also refers to rap as the "Black CNN" (McQuillar, 67).

Despite the popularity and enormous contribution of conscious rap to the reemergence of black consciousness, another sub-genre of this period, whose popularity continues within today's music industry, is Gangsta Rap. Many early rappers of this genre provided a basis for retaliation against a white-dominated society. Much of their music was characterized

[5] Tupac Shakur was considered a conscious rapper but in his later albums considered more hardcore gangsta rap

by extremely violent language that could rarely be played on the airwaves. One celebrated group that often surpassed the fame of other gangsta rappers was N.W.A (Niggaz with Attitide). With their often abusive, violent and controversial lyrics, N.W.A became one of the most popular rap names during the 1980's for both black and white listeners. Other gangsta rappers who played a large part in the popularity of gangsta rap during that particular era include N.W.A, Ice-T, and Ice Cube[6] whose rap songs, although violent, did provide the black community and general popular culture lyrics that illustrated the problems faced by Africans Americans in a racist white society. Nevertheless, with the massive cult following of gangsta rap, white corporate music industries capitalized on this rapidly growing music phenomenon and its largely white youth cult following. As the demand for gangsta rap grew, so did the mass production and reproduction of it, and the victims of this commercialization of rap music were conscious rap, hip hop generally, and, most importantly black consciousness. This dissertation looks at the rise and fall of conscious rap through two elements of African-American consciousness: the "veil" and "double consciousness" concepts that were first identified and discussed by the great American civil rights activist William Edward Burghardt Du Bois.

[6] Ice Cube was considered a gangsta rapper but in his later albums considered a conscious rapper.

Chapter 3

CONSCIOUS RAP: A STRUGGLE OF RACE.

We livin' til the day that we die, survival of the fittest, only the strong survive (Mobb Deep)[7]

In 1859 Charles Darwin published his *Origin of Species*. When these theories developed to incorporate a general theory of human and social development, the latter was used by some to justify conceptions of superior and inferior peoples and nations. According to Linda Tuhiwai Smith, "The concept of the survival of the fittest, used to explain the evolution of species in the natural world, was supplied enthusiastically to the human world. It became a very powerful belief that indigenous people were inherently weak and therefore, at some point, would die out" (Smith, 62). A social Darwinian analysis of race, as Smith points out, is an excuse used merely to have a reason to oppress those who differ from each other. By "inherently" weak, Smith means the less culturally developed civilizations, such as those from Africa, which Western civilizations regard as less intelligent and culturally inferior. Sociologist, W.E.B Du Bois was monumental in analyzing the divisions between the black and white race and in bringing to the surface the idea that all races need to understand the concept of mutual equality: "It is, then, the strife of all memorable men of the twentieth century to see that in the future competition of races the survival of the fittest shall mean the triumph of the good, the beautiful and

[7] "Survival of the Fittest" is a song taken from Mobb Deep's album "The Infamous."

the true; that we may be able to preserve for future civilizations all that is really fine and noble, and not continue to put a premium on greed and impudence and cruelty" (Du Bois, 476).

Du Bois was himself an educated man, who become the first man of African descent to receive a PhD from Harvard University; he was a sociologist, historian, philosopher, editor, writer and activist. Du Bois wrote extensively on the sociology and history of the African Americans and pioneered the editing of numerous journals and opinion devoted to racial issues and the plight of blacks in America, especially during and after the slave trade. Du Bois' notions on race challenged the prevailing racial prejudices that assumed the inferiority of blacks within the white-dominated world and sent out the message to future generations that the survival of the fittest does not does not have to have a negative impact on races.

3.1 Du Bois' Rap on Race

The sociological divisions between the white and black races are most evident in Du Bois' most famous work *Souls of Black Folk*. Du Bois brings together history, sociological data, poetry, song, and the benefit of his personal experience to propose his vision of how and why color poses such a dilemma at the turn of the twentieth century. His two seminal texts, *The Philadelphia Negro* (PN) and *Souls of Black Folk* (SBF), continue to provide insight into the ways in which African-American culture is intrinsic to the larger American culture, and how history has made that relationship inherently problematic, principally due to differences in color: "The problem of the twentieth century is the problem of the color-line, the relation of the darker to the lighter races of

men in Asia and Africa, in America and the islands of the sea" (Du Bois, 54). Much of De Bois' career was devoted to the plight of the blacks in a New World full of racists and to the division between black and white along what he refers to as the "color-line". The most striking concepts introduced by Du Bois in respect of the black experience in America are the "veil" and "double-consciousness":

> After the Egyptian and Indian, the Greek and Roman, the Teuton and Mongolian, the Negro is a sort of seventh son, born with a veil, and gifted with second-sight in this American world,—a world which yields him no true self-consciousness, but only lets him see himself through the revelation of the other world. It is a peculiar sensation, this double-consciousness, this sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others, of measuring one's soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity. One ever feels his two-ness,—an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder (Du Bois, 364).

For Du Bois, the veil has reference to three things. First, the veil suggests the dark skin of the black race, which is different in color to white skin. The veil also suggests white people's inability to see blacks as true Americans and lastly, the veil refers to the difficulties that blacks have in seeing themselves outside of what white Americans perceive them to be. Du Bois' own experience of the veil was at a ball in which his invitation was "peremptorily" refused by a white girl because of his color: "then it dawned upon me with certain suddenness that I was different from the others; or like, mayhap, in heart and life and longing, but shut out from their world by a vast veil. I had thereafter no desire to tear down the veil, to creep through; I held all beyond it in common contempt, and lived above it in a region of blue sky and great wandering shadows" (364). The veil, according to Du Bois, symbolizes the refusal of white society to see him. Thus, for whites the black individual is considered invisible. This invisibility

has always been a common feature in many black art forms that deal with the onslaught of racism. Literature, in particular, focuses on the theme of black invisibility and there is a string of novels that make reference to it, for example Toni Morrison's *Beloved*, Nelle Harper Lee's *To Kill a Mockingbird* and Philip Roth's *The Human Stain.* Ralph Ellison's novel *Invisible Man* showcases the division of races and the enormous struggle of self-identity experienced by black folks. Ellison uses the word "veil" several times in the book as he exposes racist white America, using his main character, the "narrator", to do so: "I am a man of substance, of flesh and bone, fiber and liquids - and I might even be said to possess a mind. I am invisible; understand, simply because people refuse to see me" (Ellison, 7). In other words, the veil makes African American experiences invisible to the white man.

To help understand his place in this society, Du Bois wanted to inform both blacks and whites that each of them had much to offer:

> The history of the American Negro is the history of this strife, - this longing to attain self-conscious manhood, to merge his double self into a better and truer self. In this merging he wishes neither of the older selves to be lost. He would not Africanize America, for America has too much to teach the world and Africa. He would not bleach his Negro soul in a flood of white Americanism, for he knows that Negro blood has a message for the world. He simply wishes to make it possible for a man to be Negro and American, without being cursed and spit upon by his fellows, without the doors of Opportunity closed roughly in his face. (Du Bois, 365)

The aim of Du Bois' striving, like most blacks in America, was to become as one soul, without eliminating one or the other, to disconnect themselves from the veil and double consciousness which have clouded their life. He knows that he can teach the white race many things about Africa and Africans; as long as the doors of "opportunity" are open.

3.2 Slaves of the fields, Slaves of the Streets: from Africa to America

Du Bois' sociological perspective on race was based on the treatment of blacks before and after slavery. The slave trade, which began in the 17th century, is sometimes called the 'maafa' by African and African-American scholars, which is Swahili for 'holocaust' or 'great disaster'. Slaves were deported from Africa to America on ships, and these voyages, called the "Middle Passages", lasted up to a month. The conditions on the ships were so dire that as many as half of the slaves would die along the way. Later, slaves were brought to plantations in the Southern states to grow sugar cane, rice and cotton. By the time slavery ended, in 1865, the slave population was approximately four million people, many of whom died from the grueling work on the plantations. On plantations, slaves were chained so that they could neither escape nor fight back. Michael A.Gomez writes:

> The capture of Africans in Africa, and their subsequent shipment to the Americas … result[ed] in the redirection of the tributaries of life, now flowing through bitter waters of dismemberment and disease, emptying into silver-laced seas of indigo and cane and coffee and cotton. Indeed, the overwhelming majority of them, about 90%, would be consumed by the production of sugar throughout the Americas between the 17th and 19th centuries. The apocalypse had come, in everyway as murderous and cataclysmic and altering as any scenario envisioned by prophetic revelation (Gomez, 178).

Arriving in the Americas, after the long, treacherous voyage, the slaves began work almost immediately on the fields. The large majority of the slaves, who were unaccustomed to such labors were continuously goaded and beaten by their white masters or on larger plantations by slave overseers. On large plantations, the overseers were authorized to whip and brutalize the slaves. Indeed, slave codes authorized or even required the use of violence and slave patrols regulated and monitored the movement of

slaves. These patrols were conscripted from the white population and given authority to use summary punishment against escapees, including capital punishment if necessary.

A hundred years later rap music, especially conscious rap, continued to echo the slave experience of the past and related similar experiences to those of their ancestors. The only difference was that they were a modern generation of African-American slaves. The 80's and 90's, the period when conscious rap flourished, is remembered for devastating racial conflicts between black and white communities. In particular, the Los Angeles riots in 1992, known as the L.A. Civil Unrest, were sparked when a jury acquitted four L.A. Police Department officers accused of beating African-American Rodney King. In the aftermath of the decision, blacks all around America and particularly in L.A were outraged by the decision and the riots left 53 dead.

In the song "Sound of Da Police", rapper KRS-One cleverly conflates the police and the overseer, the African American and the slave to emphasize the continuity between the racist attitudes of the past and those that African Americans are still experiencing today:

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 patroling 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!

(Woop!) They both ride horses
After 400 years, I've got no choices![8]

The first few lines of this song show how intensely frustrated the rapper is. He makes it clear that the society in which he lives is no different from the days of slavery when he shouts out the word 'overseer' three times, and the word 'officer' four times. His comparison of both illustrates the fact that the policeman, who is supposed to be a law enforcer and to protect the innocent, is no different from the overseer, and is actually feared more. A further similarity can be seen in the words 'rode' and 'patrolling', the overseer controlling the slaves on horseback, the officer riding in a police vehicle to control the African-American minority. The point being made here is that the blacks have never been free to roam; they have always been under strict surveillance.

During the slave experience, any attempt to run away would lead to death. Similarly any youth of the early 80's and 90's and nineties would be shot for any suspicious action, as noted by KRS-One in their song "Sound of Da Police".

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.

In the final line of the song, KRS-One concludes by rapping: "After 400 years, I've got no choices". Here the rapper is comparing the slavery of his fore-brothers with his own experience in a society in which he suffers policing by a corrupt white law enforcer who will not hesitate to shoot to kill. The historical and present experience of the black man in America is one of enormous strife: a struggle to survive under such strict and brutal regulations. The overseer and the police show no mercy to the African Americans and have helped only to make the black man question his true self. This is what Du Bois

[8] All rap lyrics are taken from Sing365.com

means by double consciousness and the need to always look at oneself through the eyes of another is the result of the overwhelming prejudice under which the black race lives.

Public Enemy, one of the most popular conscious rap groups, has constantly rapped about the history of slavery and repeatedly asks why blacks have been treated as inferior within their own society. In their song, "By the Time I Get To Arizona", the group contemplate how the past and the present has not changed within American society, and how they are still living and dying of the same white racism that haunted their fore-brothers:

He try to keep it yesteryear
The good ol' days
The same ol' ways
That kept us dyin.

Public Enemy, of course, is ironically referring the "good ol' days" of slavery. The group continues to stab at the white racist institution in the song, "Who Stole the Soul". In this song, Public Enemy rap about the appropriation of black culture and the hijacking of the human spirit by a white-dominated system. The song also makes reference to the apartheid problem that once faced South Africa:

Ain't no different
Than in South Africa
Over here they'll go after ya to steal your soul
Like over there they stole our gold.

Public Enemy's mission as a conscious rap group has been to educate both blacks and a faction of white supporters by rapping on the racial difficulties faced by the blacks now and in the past. The song, "Can't Truss It" is another example of this type of education:

Kicking wicked rhymes. . . .
because [of] the wickedness done by Jack. . . .
wearing Red-White-and-Blue, Jack and his crew. . . .

ninety days on a slave ship. . . .
I pray to get my hands around the neck of the man with the whip. . . .
it's all about money when it comes to Armageddon;
mean, I'm getting mine; here I am; turn it over, Sam; 427 to the year;
do you understand; that's why it's hard for the black to love the land...
But then again I got a story…cost of the Holocaust
I'm talkin' bout the one still goin' on.

In this song, the rapper recounts a gripping account of the slave trade and illustrates how the same horrors of the past continue to haunt his race today. From the very start of the voyage to America, blacks were fooled by the "Red-White-and-Blue [of] Jack and his crew", which is a reference to the white Americans who lynched them on slave ships and on plantations. The name "Jack", meaning white boy, reflects the universal hatred of whites by blacks, and is usually used by Public Enemy and other rappers to refer to whites. The racial prejudice is similar to the suffered by the Jews during the 'Holocaust', only the black holocaust is "still goin on". The rapper who is living under the "whip" hand of racist society demands from white America, "Sam", to "turn over" to the blacks what is rightfully theirs after "427" years of slavery. When "Armageddon" finally comes, says Public Enemy, the rapper, the African American, will get their due.

3.3 "The Devil Split us in Pairs"[9]

Du Bois' reference to double consciousness and the veil not only define an intrinsic aspect of black American culture, but also define the foundation of conscious rap. For both Du Bois and conscious rappers the society in which they live in neither understands or tries to appreciate the plight of the blacks, who are "kept within bounds", often "spat on" (Du Bois, 934). Of this division, Rose writes:

> Hip hop inscribes life on the margins, is situated at the crossroads of lack and desire and is a cultural form that attempts to negotiate the experiences of

[9] "The Devil Split us in Pairs" is a line from Public Enemy's "Pollywannacracker".

> marginalization, brutally truncated opportunity, and oppression within the cultural imperatives of African American community. (Rose, 6)

Public Enemy in particular raps on the marginality of blacks in society and points the finger of blame at racist white Americans. In many of their rap songs, they ventilate the idea that a prevailing racial prejudice inflicted by whites on blacks imposed a feeling of social exclusion:

No man is God
And God put us all here
But this system has no wisdom
The devil split us in pairs
And taught us White is Good Black is Bad.

In this fragment from their song "Pollywanacracka", lead rapper, Chuck D argues that white America has demonized and ostracized the black Americans. This feeling can be found in the words "the devil split us in pairs", which metaphorically expresses the idea that white racism, "the devil", is responsible for segregation in American society in which whites occupy a superior position and blacks an inferior one. Reference to whites as "devils" has also been used in lyrics by other conscious rappers such as Brand Nubian's "Drop the Bomb" and "The Devil Made Me Do It" by Paris. Rapper Tupac Shakur, also known as 2pac, was another conscious rapper who rhymed about the injustices inflicted on African Americans. In his song, "Me Against the World", he raps:

No one in the world loves me
I'm headed for danger, don't trust strangers
Put one in the chamber whenever I'm feeling this anger
Don't wanna make make excuses, cause this is how it is
What's the use unless we're shootin' no one notices the youth
It's just me against the world baby.

The ultimate lesson of this song is that white American society has no concern for its black citizens. By rhyming the words "danger" and "strangers" saying that the life of a black youth is in danger of being taken by white law enforcers who see blacks as

strangers. The rapper also rhymes the words “excuses” and “use” as a reaction to the violence used against him. Why would he bother trying to explain the position he is in when it is obvious that the problems within black communities have never been an issue to those of superior ranking? Since no-one is listening, blacks turn to violence: they “put one in the chamber”, a bullet in a gun, and become a focus of attention only when they are killing a white man.

In his song “Changes”, Tupac provides another description of how it feels to be black and American, and how the “doors of opportunity” are closed to blacks:

> Cops give a damn about a negro
> pull the trigger kill a nigga he's a hero
> Give the crack to the kids who the hell cares
> one less hungry mouth on the welfare
> First ship 'em dope & let 'em deal the brothers
> give 'em guns step back watch 'em kill each other.

As with KRS-One, the main culprit for Tupac is the law enforcers. These police officers do not abide by their social mission, to serve and protect, but are part of the system that is killing off the black youth of society. This is exemplified in the words “negro” and “hero”, the former being the bad guy and the white policeman being awarded for the killing of a black man, which would mean one less problem on the streets. The poverty of the black youth is of no concern to the superior white authorities, and the rhyme “care” and “welfare”, shows how blacks have been completely been ignored by the ruling whites, who would be happy to save an extra dollar of their money. The corruption of the police is implied in the words “first ship em’ dope”. By turning a blind eye to the illegal dealing of drugs on the streets the white law enforcers can enjoy the spectacle of ‘blacks killing blacks’, which of course serves the police officers the job of killing them. Tupac,

like many rappers of the time, voiced black anger towards police brutality and the use excessive force against African American youth.

Although the slave trade was long gone, rappers of the eighties and nineties exposed the overwhelming problems of an era dominated by tag-team presidents Ronald Reagan and George Bush Sr. Tupac was very forward in his description of the two, stating: "I don't want George Bush in government", he said. "I've spent eight of my 17 years on this earth under a Republican, Ronald Reagan, who's an ex actor who lies to the people, and who has done nothing for me at all".[10]

Unlike Tupac, Ice-T launches a more vicious attack on the government by sending a 'shout out' to all those he thinks have a negative impact on African Americans during that era: "This special shout out, 'Fuck the police, Fuck the F.B.I, Fuck the D.E.A, Fuck the C.I.A, Fuck Tipper Gore, Bush and his crippled bitch."[11]. Ice-T's lyrics go straight to the core of the problem: the authorities that exist within America are to blame for the plight of the African Americans, especially law protectors, and George Bush Sr. There were many problems inflicted upon African Americans during the Reagan/Bush era: deterioration of living conditions, drug problems, violence, unemployment and lack of funding for education. One of the earliest rap songs to reflect the social and psychological conditions of African Americans under Reagan's presidency was "The Message", a hit

[10] Cited from Michael Eric Dyson, *Holler If You Hear Me: Searching for Tupac Shakur* (New York, NY: Basic Civitas Books, 2001), 81.
[11] Taken from Ice-T's song "Ya Should Of Killed Me Last Year."

song in 1982 by Grandmaster Flash and the Furious Five. An excerpt from the song reveals the frustrations of African Americans at time:

> You'll grow in the ghetto, living second rate, And your eyes will sing a song of deep hate, The places you're playin', where you stay, Looks like one great big alley way…Don't push me cause I'm close to the edge, I'm trying not to lose my head. It's a jungle sometimes; it makes me wonder how I keep from going under.

"The Message" is a cry of anger at the ghetto life and with it a sense of hopelessness. The burden of being black and living in a white-dominated society, subjected to poor living conditions, often becomes intolerable. The phrase: "You'll grow in the ghetto, living second rate" is a reminder that blacks were not only second-class citizens, but unable to find themselves in the American consciousness, in the "melting pot" or the "American Dream". "Panther Power", a song written by Tupac, exemplifies the idea that the American dream was in fact one that never included blacks:

> As real as it seems the American Dream
> Ain't nothing but another calculated scheme
> Kept my history a mystery but now I see
> The American Dream wasn't meant for me.

The black's exclusion from the "American Dream" is a reflection of the veil within America as it acts as a barrier, preventing blacks from achieving the goals and opportunities that have been reserved for whites. Du Bois' concept of the veil is contained in the rhyme "history" and "mystery" because the white American history has hidden the truth of both Tupac's own identity and that of his culture. This history needed to be written and heard, and through conscious rap artists and their songs it would be.

The experience of colonialism, the lack of understanding, the rejection, the persecution and the invisibility are all issues raised by rappers of conscious rap. To the questions: How is one to deal with the tragedies of the color-line? How will the black race overcome

this history of slavery and subjugation? How will they progress and flourish? The rapper's answer to this was simple: education.

3.4 Rap as the Talented Tenth!

Due to the struggles of the African-Americans, education was very difficult to attain, especially due to segregation and their rejection in white society. To receive education was almost impossible, and many colonizers had their own ideas of what education should be in respect of the blacks. Rose notes how some sociologists believed that slavery was a positive concept since the wiping out of African traditions and their replacement with new Western cultural traditions would benefit them far more than their own.

> For most of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries black people were considered devoid of any cultural traditions, and thus their "inferiority" was said to be based on presumed racially determined biological differences in intelligence. The overall idea was that slavery wiped out African approaches to sound, language, movement, food, space, time, and so on, and that black Americans were not as evolved as whites and therefore represented a culturally clean slate
> (Rose, 64).

The whole point of a "culturally clean slate" is related to how Africans were uprooted from their homes, chained in slave ships, and transplanted to plantations, stripped of their cultural and geographical environment, their identities became a clean slate: they lost their history and the meaning of what it meant to be African. The eradication of black history did not elude conscious rappers, who believe that white racist society has deliberately prevented them from remembering it.

Public Enemy's criticism of the educational system in the United States focuses on the content of the curricula. According to Public Enemy, Afro-American history is not taken

into account in the new curricula. The history books completely direct attention to white America and the rap group believes that this is one of the reasons why many black Americans lack race awareness. Because they do not know the history of black America, they do not have a black identity. In the lyrics of "Brothers Gonna Work It Out", Public Enemy reiterates the fact that black history has been neglected in the education system of America:

To the brothers in the streets
Schools and the prisons
History shouldn't be a mystery
Our stories real history,
Not this story.

The group is urging all African Americans, wherever they are, not to be ignorant of their history, even though it has been hidden from them for years. Instead of it being a "mystery", they should investigate, locate and study their past and not limit themselves to the history studied in institutions. Reflecting back on the song "Words of Wisdom", it is clear that Tupac concurs with Public Enemy's arguments:

Words of Wisdom
They shine upon the strength of a nation
Conquer the enemy on with education
Protect thy self, reach with what you wanna do
Know thy self, teach what we been through
On with the knowledge of the place, then
No one will ever oppress this race again
No Malcolm X in my history text
Why is that?
Cause he tried to educate and liberate all blacks.

Though Black studies emerged in the education system, during the 1980's and 90's it did not provide a comprehensive view of it. The importance of education was very important in black consciousness, especially since it was the key for a better future. Of this,

Malcolm X proclaimed that, “Education is the passport to the future, for tomorrow belongs to those who prepare for it today” (www.blackpast.org).

On the cover of “Apocalypse 91: The Enemy Strikes Black”, Public Enemy's rapper Chuck D discerns the importance of high quality education, not only for the black man in general, but also for rappers who should first of all finish school. He commands: “Let’s get down to business, mental self-defensive fitness.” The rapper is claiming here that intelligence is the concept of black progression; it is both weapon and armor. The whole idea of intelligence is instrumental in the education of black history and, to reconstruct it, there needs to be those who are willing to rise among its own race to do so. Du Bois’ introduces the concept of the Talented Tenth to build up the African consciousness and to reinforce the cultural dimensions that Africa offers and inform of its rich history:

> The Negro race, like all races, is going to be saved by its exceptional men. The problem of education, then, among Negroes must first of all deal with the Talented Tenth; it is the problem of developing the Best of this race that they may guide the Mass away from the contamination and death of the Worst, in their own and other races. Now the training of men is a difficult and intricate task. Its technique is a matter for educational experts, but its object is for the vision of seers. If we make money the object of man-training, we shall develop money-makers but not necessarily men; if we make technical skill the object of education, we may possess artisans but not, in nature, men. Men we shall have only as we make manhood the object of the work of the schools—intelligence, broad sympathy, knowledge of the world that was and is, and of the relation of men to it—this is the curriculum of that Higher Education which must underlie true life. On this foundation we may build bread winning, skill of hand and quickness of brain, with never a fear lest the child and man mistake the means of living for the object of life (Du Bois, 842).

Du Bois used the term “the Talented Tenth" to describe the likelihood of one in ten black men becoming leaders of their race in the world, through methods such as continuing education, writing books, or becoming directly involved in social change. He argues that

the best and brightest African Americans, the talented ten percent, must be afforded higher education if progress is to be made. The ten percent will then constitute leaders that effectively initiate change through their leadership. Martin Luther King, Malcolm X, Louis Farrakhan, Rosa Parks, Langston Hughes, Frederick Douglas, Marcus Garvey and Jesse Jackson are all intellectuals who have made a decisive contribution to the progress of the black race. To these names, one must add intellectual rap scholars whose aim is to educate and inspire African Americans, to inform them of their history and provide them with a positive vision for the future. These rappers perpetuated the talented tenth theory of Du Bois, which emphasized that: "Education must not simply teach work it must teach life. The Talented Tenth of the Negro race must be made leaders of thought and missionaries of culture among their people" (861). Du Bois' vision of education and culture had an enormous impact on the golden age of conscious rap; it provided enlightenment on African history and the African-American experience in order to instill in every African American a feeling of self-respect and respect for its own race. Many conscious rappers expressed the "Proud to be Black" motto, and exposed the harsh reality of the African-American experience.

Like Du Bois, conscious rappers have embedded their words in a love of Africa. Their aim is to reminisce and teach African Americans and other races the ancestral and historical importance of Africa. In "I Can", rapper Nas directs his lyrics to the greatness that Africa once was, with its prosperity and ancient civilizations. Yet he also reminds listeners that all this has been stripped away by colonialism and that only way to regain it for future generations to seek it, education being the tool:

Be, be, 'fore we came to this country
We were kings and queens, never porch monkeys
There was empires in Africa called Kush
Timbuktu, where every race came to get books
To learn from black teachers who taught Greeks and Romans
Asian Arabs and gave them gold when
Gold was converted to money it all changed
Money then became empowerment for Europeans
The Persian military invaded
They heard about the gold, the teachings, and everything sacred
Africa was almost robbed naked
Slavery was money, so they began making slave ships…

If the truth is told, the youth can grow
Then learn to survive until they gain control
Nobody says you have to be gangstas, hoes
Read more learn more, change the globe
Ghetto children, do your thing
Hold your head up, little man, you're a king
Young Princess when you get your wedding ring
Your man is saying She's my queen.

In this song, Nas is giving the African perspective on their history African American and making sure that young naïve African-American children understand and appreciate how the black race played a great part in the history of the world. He proclaims that blacks were once “kings” and “queens”, yet were reduced to “porch monkeys”, a racial slur for slaves during colonialism and were forced to sit on the porch all day. His reference to this shows how blacks are seen today: they have been outcast by the white society, with little or no opportunities and forced to feed off welfare and sit at home or even worse to commit crimes to survive. Nas also explains how virgin Africa was a land of great prosperity and dominated of great civilizations such as Egypt and Kush. The implicit here is that Africa was once as great, as prosperous, and as dominant as America now is.

For Nas, it is important that African Americans remember their roots, their past and how Africa signified greatness. The rapper is suggesting that there is a need of awareness in the education system so that a black perspective on history can provide them with a vital

cultural dimension to them: “If the truth is told, the youth can grow/ They learn to survive until they gain control”. The control he is speaking of is one that has been lost due to white racist superiority, both now and in the past. At the end of the song, the rapper bestows royalty on the ghetto children to remind them of their illustrious African history.

KRS-One continues the glorification of Africa in their song “Blackman in Effect”. Not only do they reflect on African roots and affirm the greatness of African culture but envisage a unity of cultures, once white supremacists “realize” their subordinate place in history”:

Near the Tigris and Euphrates Valleys in Asia
Lies the Garden of Eden
Where Adam became a father to humanity
Now don't get mad at me
But according to facts, this seems just fantasy
Because man, the most ancient man
Was found thousands of years before Adam began
And where he was found, again they can't laugh at ya
It's right, dead, smack in Africa
But due to religious and political power
We must be denied the facts every hour…

The point is that we descend from kings
Science, art and beautiful things
African history is the world’s history
This is the missing link and mystery
Once we realise they all are African
White will sit down with black and laugh again.

Once again, the “history-mystery” rhyme is a call to African-Americans to tear away the veil and learn about their glorious history. The line, “We must be denied the facts every hour”, refers to both the education system and the media in America which have falsified history in order to maintain religious or political control. The truth of the African race has always been hidden from African-Americans. At the end of the song, the utopian vision

of white and black sitting down together and laughing is probably ironic as the word "laugh" suggests this will never happen.

The Africa that Nas and KRS-One speak of one of great empires, an Africa which was rich in culture and in gold – a reminder to African Americans that they were not an inferior race but a superior one. This powerful continent, as it once was, has been divided by the overwhelmingly greedy, colonialist nations who "transformed the face of her social life, overthrew organized government, and distorted ancient industry, and snuffed out the lights of cultural development:

> Today, instead removing laborers from Africa to distant slavery, industry built on a new slavery approaches Africa to deprive the natives of their land, to force them to toil and to reap all the profit for the white world (Du Bois, 939).

These sufferings and the history of black subjugation for the "profit" of the whites is at the heart of conscious rap lyrics. Due to its popularity, rap became a tool to educate, a way to remember the past, and a means of seeing through the veil and overcoming the double consciousness that weighs African Americans down.

Chapter 4

THE AFRICAN AWAKENING: AN UNVEILING

> For Africa to me … is more than a glamorous fact. It is a historical truth. No man can know where he is going unless he knows exactly where he has been and exactly how he arrived at this present place. (Maya Angelou)[12]

The signature element of hip hop music during the 1980's and 90's was its resistant and empowering voices that created a sense of unity within the African-American community. During this golden age of rap, almost all rap artists emphasized the vitality of Africa and of being African. Rap music was the vehicle that transported the African American to a new sensation of blackness, and was a source of inspiration, education and motivation within the African diaspora. Rap became the symbol of African consciousness, and in rap the black community found themselves and the authentic roots of African culture, whether in African history, music, religion or custom. It was an era that glorified the mottos "Proud to be Black", "Too Black, Too Strong" and "Black is Beautiful" that all serve as part of the aura of unity within the community.

Despite this new sense of black pride, the blacks were also aware that their time of jubilation and aspiration was doomed to be short lived for they have always suffered at the hands of white racists. Although conscious rap was hugely successful in bridging black American consciousness and the African consciousness, it did not provide the

[12] Quoted from, the New York Times, April 16, 1972.

channels needed for whites to explore or appreciate the African culture, nor did it serve as a means to control racism. An insight into the struggle to attain and sustain African consciousness is given in Derrick Bell's book of short stories *Faces at the Bottom of the Well*, which serves as an example of the difficulties of resurrecting the African consciousness in a racist white society.

4.1 "African Dream"[13]: Bell's "Afrolantica Awakening"

In his introduction to *Faces at the Bottom of the Well* Bell echoes Du Bois' theory of the veil by situating blacks at the bottom of society's well. In this position they can never be properly seen by the whites mainly because the whites do not want to see them. According to Bell this is because the whites gain their self-esteem by "gazing down on us" (Bell, xi). Bell's own thesis is that "racism is an integral, permanent, and indestructible component of this society" (Bell, ix). In Bell's second short story, "Afrolantica Awakening", we find ourselves within the problematic issues of double consciousness because it is a struggle between African and American. The chapter serves to underline white dominance and focuses on the blacks need to escape from America to a place that will not only give them more freedom, but will constitute and preserve black consciousness. In his essay, "Back to Afrolantica: A Legacy of (Black) Perseverance?" Kevin Hopkin's writes:

> "Back to Africa" movements have appealed to large masses of Black Americans for nearly two centuries. Leaders of these movements have exhorted blacks to leave the United States and to move to Africa or the Caribbean in order to escape European imperialism and white supremacy. In Afrolantica Legacies, Professor Derrick Bell again considers the emigration of Black Americans to a place conducive to their survival and the effects of their absence on white America.
> (Hopkins, 56)

[13] This is a title of a song by Talib Kweli.

The "emigration" that Bell dreams of is central to his story. In "Afrolantica Awakening", Bell imagines a new continent arising out of the Atlantic Ocean, with "beautiful beaches", "majestic mountains" and "rich vegetation" (Bell, 33). It is a utopian fantasy, similar to the one identified and employed by historian Robin D.G Kelly as the "freedom dreams", which is the belief that to make a better world one must imagine it first.

The element of imagination in Bell's perfect island is the absence of white people who could not survive on it due to the air pressure. The whites would not be able to breathe because they would feel that they were "trying to breathe under the burdens of the world" (Bell, 34). Bell uses this description to evoke the feelings that blacks experience in American society as a result of being constantly treated as second-class citizens. It is for this reason that the imaginary island Bell writes of would be welcomed by many black Americans because it would serve as a means of escape from a society that is dogged by racism. Julius Lester in his article, "The Necessity for Separation" agrees with Bell:

> The whole idea of a black nation seems so far-fetched as to be ludicrous, but if you entertain it for a minute, even as an impossible dream, it should give you a feeling of wholeness and belonging you have never had and can never have as long as blacks have to live in a country where they are despised (Lester, 166).

Lester's dream is embellished in Bell's Afrolantica, an island that has risen from the Atlantic for the purpose of black liberty, an island which only blacks can survive in and which provides a prosperous future for the black community. It also provides a hope of uniting the people and establishing an island that has no room for racism. The removal of racism, which is something Bell visualizes and is the reason for the island of Afrolantica, is in fact a dream that all black Americans share and one that Du Bois himself longed for. For Du Bois, it was not an imaginary Afrolantica that manifested these dreams of an

island free of racism, but the island of Jamaica: “Jamaica is a most amazing island. In Jamaica for the first time in my life I lived beyond the color-line – not on one side of it but beyond its end”. (Du Bois, 1167)

Du Bois’ description of Jamaica plays a vital role in questioning the division of the color-line that exists between blacks and whites. The island of Jamaica, primarily all blacks, is a place that Du Bois can find comfort and also realize his self-identity. He feels at home in Jamaica and his black consciousness is never divided between the black and the white, because there is a very limited white population to look down on him. This Afrolantica utopia that Bell dreams of is something that Du Bois himself has experienced. For Bell, this island, like Jamaica, might be a solution to the problem of double consciousness.

To reawaken “African” consciousness, black Americans need to be reminded of their African roots, and during the golden age of rap many rappers emphasized the importance of their descent and instilled national pride in African Americans by frequently rhyming about the colors of Africa. The Pan-African colors red, black and green were imported into the black American culture and became a symbol of African consciousness. These colors also gave black Americans a better understanding of their culture and self-identity. Rap group Jungle Brothers expressed this new pride in Africa in their song “Acknowledge Your Own History”: “The red’s for the blood/ and the black’s for the man/ the green is the color that stands for the land”. More importantly, these revitalized colors served as a revolutionary statement to the African Americans because the colors have all the traits that embody the struggles they have experienced in this New World

they call America: the blood of slavery and police brutality, the blacks who have been subjugated by institutionalized racism, and the green of the land on which they have toiled under such harsh conditions. This new awakening of an African side of double consciousness and sudden interest in Africa opened a new door of hope. It also helped awaken the more nationalistic and radical black elements in American society that were known as the Black Power Movements.[14]

These movements were vital to both African-American nationalism and the African side of double consciousness, and used all available means to oppose the oppression of the white racist American society.

4.2 "Party for your right to fight"15: Nationalism and Institutionalized Racism

In Bell's "Afrolantica Awakening", which depicts a land that guarantees the survival of blacks only, the media refers to Afrolantica as a black version of the Jewish "Promised Land". This land that provides so much hope for the black community also created divisions within it. Some people were opposed to emigration since it would be a disaster for all the years of struggle for equality and for the progress they had made. Other people were in favor of emigration and argued that efforts to establish black communities in America had been harshly opposed by whites and that a black nation would awaken black pride and constitute a place that would provide them with their own autonomy, one that would lift the veil that had kept them as second-class citizens for so long. For those who wanted to be part of the "Promised Land", emigration to Afrolantica was the only way to

[14] The Black Power Movments grew out of the Civil Rights Movement during the 1950's and 1960's.
[15] This is a title of a song by Public Enemy's album.

unveil themselves and to revive their African roots and renew their pride in being African.

To overcome the veil and the double consciousness that is embedded in African-American consciousness, radical, militant and revolutionary Black Power Movements such as the Nation of Islam, Organization of Afro-American Unity, Zulu Nation, Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee and the Black Panther Party were formed as cultural, intellectual, ideological and political movements to achieve civil equality, human dignity and black development by overthrowing racial discrimination. These movements, like Bell, dreamed of a "Promised Land", an independent state that would distance them from the racist white American society. Dennis Smith, in his article "The Real Republic of New Africa", explains how these movements aspired to form a nation of their own, their own Afrolantica, not in the Atlantic Ocean but within America:

> In the late 1960's, during the height of the Black Power Movement, two acquaintances of Malcolm X, Gaidi Obadele and Imari Abubakari Obadale, assembled five hundred militants to discuss the creation of a black nation within the United States. On March 31, 1968, 100 conference members signed a Declaration of Independence outlining the official doctrine of the new black nation, elected a provisional government, and named the nation the "Republic of New Africa"… It is land that Blacks must gain control of because, as Malcolm X said, land id the basis of independence, freedom, justice and equality. The RNA even identified the five states of Mississippi, Lousiana, Alabama, Georgia and South Carolina as Black people's land (www.wlbt.com).

The RNA, a Black Nationalist social movement planned to gain control of land within America, for without land, there was no freedom. The Republic, of course, never became a reality but the contributions of the RNA did provide a nationalist goal that many blacks longed for.

One of the most appealing aspects of hip hop during the golden age of rap was its continuation of the African nationalist ideal that Bell, the RNA and the Black Power Movements promoted. Conscious rap instilled these ideals into African Americans by rapping with lyrics about race relations, black pride, black power and rebellions arising from a historically oppressed community. As a result, nationalist motivation grew once more within the black community and with it a pride in being both black and African. This Black Nationalism is described by M. Karenga as:

> The political belief and practice of African Americans as a distinct people with a distinct historical personality who politically should develop structures to define, defend, and develop the interests of blacks as a people. This entails a redefinition of reality of black images and interests, providing a social corrective by building institutional and organizational structures that house black aspirations, and it provides a collective vocation of nation building among black people as a political end (Karenga, 15).

Karenga's definition reveals the same objectives as those of Bell and the RNA: to create "structures that house black aspirations". These aspirations of the black community to develop and create a society that will help them to develop and define their black consciousness are rooted in a consciousness that Africa and African history is a vital part of black American's self-identity. The black community, as Karenga claims needs a "redefinition of black images and interests", and although black movements popularized this purpose, it was revived and strengthened by conscious rap.

Conscious rappers became the new revolutionaries with their promotion of nationalism and their resurrection of an African consciousness. In their song "Party for Your Right to Fight", Public Enemy argue how the Black Power Movement was vital for the black

community and how institutionalized racism was the reason why blacks desired to relocate themselves outside of white America:

Power equality and we're out to get it, I know some of you ain't wit' it
This party started right in '66, With a pro Black radical mix
Then at the hour of twelve. Some force cut the power and emerged from hell
It was your so called government that made this occur
Like the grafted devils they were

J. Edgar Hoover and he coulda' proved to ya', He had King and X set up
Also the party with Newton, Cleaver and Seale he ended, so get up
Time to get em back (You got it)
Get back on the track (You got it)
Word from the honorable Elijah Muhammed
Know who you are to be Black

To those that disagree it causes static for the original Black Asiatic man
Cream of the earth and was here first
And some devils prevent this from being known
But you check out the books they own
Even Masons they know it but refuse to show it,
But it's proven and fact
And it takes a nation of millions to hold us back.

In the song, there is a clear conflict between the black and white authorities and it is the former that prevails. The rhyme "66" and "radical mix" refers to the emergence of the Black Power Movement in 1966 after the Civil Rights Movement, and the mix includes African-American icons such as the Black Panthers, Martin Luther King Jr. and Malcolm X who helped to eradicate racism but also rebelled against the white American racists. African consciousness is seen here to come under threat by the white "devils", especially American president J.Edgar Hoover who was partially to blame for the assassinations of King and Malcolm X, the two most famous black icons who fought to preserve and reinstate a proud nationalist consciousness in their black communities.

Public Enemy and many other conscious rappers offered a new face of African-American nationalism and with it black consciousness gained the strength to overpower the white

consciousness. The double consciousness that had split their identities for so long suddenly became blacker. Conscious rap became the mouthpiece for all African Americans and spawned an interest in resurrecting black history and culture. As seen in Public Enemy's song, "Party for Your Right to Fight", conscious rappers have taught African Americans to "Know who you are to be Black". They did this by reminding them of "the Black Asiatic man" who lived on the earth before the white devils, whose white-biased history made black Americans forget that they were the "Cream of the earth".

The way white American history suppresses black history is a form of institutionalized racism. Another form is white American legislation, which X-Clan rap about in their song "Fire and Earth":

> Revolution, evolution, the solution
> No amendments, and burn the Constitution
> You take the authors, a bunch of old wig-ers
> Who ratified extinction of the poor, Black niggas
> Know why? Cause I'm that nigga that they can't stand
> That teach an African how to say, "Black man!"
> And I'm that nigga they can plainly see
> With the nationalist colors of the red, black, green.

X-Clan's rap on the division of race in America unveils a universal truth: black Americans have never been part or ever been intended to be part of the "American Dream". The words "amendments", "Constitution" and "ratified" are all connected to the 14th Amendment to the U.S Constitution. Despite the ratification of the amendment in 1868, granting freedom to all persons born or naturalized in the Unites States, including slaves, the rappers know that this freedom has never been part of black consciousness because black segregation is an embedded concept in the white American consciousness. Though there has been black "revolution", "evolution" and "solution", the "wig-ers",

these biased law-makers, have always found ways to put blacks in their place as second-class citizens. X-Clan know that they and other blacks are the "poor" of America, and the equality that is guaranteed in the Constitution is an equality among whites that has never been extended to the blacks or provided them with liberty, but instead continues to veil black Americans. These black Americans have not been protected by the 14th Amendment; they have been subjected to institutionalized racism inflicted by the law makers of America who ratified the Amendment but did not implement it.

Institutionalized racism plays a key role in "Afrolantica Awakening". One of the main reasons why Afrolantica remains an impossible fantasy is because the all-white government and all-white law makers created legal barriers for African Americans who to emigrate:

> Visas were not available, of course; and immigration officials warned that since Afrolantica did not exist as a governmental entity, blacks moving there might sacrifice both their citizenship and their entitlement to return to America – even to visit relatives and friends (Bell, 44).

These white authorities were aware that blacks were for the first time edging closer to freedom to and unveil their black American consciousness, and tried to prevent emigration. They were also aware that white people need African Americans to be at the bottom of the society or else it might be them. The black population realized they were sacrificing their American citizenship for Afrolantica but despite this departed for the island on Fourth of July, which ironically is the day of American Independence. To their despair, the black American's in the thousand ships that departed to the island could not fathom the shocking turn of events: first there was a sudden change in weather forcing the ships to return, and then the island itself sank and submerged back into the ocean:

> The sight that met the eyes of the blacks on the emigrant armada was amazing, terrifying. Afrolantica was sinking back into the ocean whence it has arisen. The blacks on the ships knew they were witnessing the greatest natural spectacle in world history. "My God, what's happening?" was the universal question. It was replaced almost immediately, in the minds of those that were watching from the safety of their television sets in America, by another: Was Afrolantica, after all, no more than a cruel hoax, Nature's seismic confirmation that African Americans are preordained to their victimized, outcast state? (Bell, 45).

The sinking of Afrolantica is of course the submerging of black consciousness and symbolizes the impossibility of finding a utopian nation. For African Americans, the emigrants had no choice but to return to the white racist American society. The word "hoax" mentioned by Bell is a powerful startling reminder of how the blacks of America have been continuously misled and mistreated ever since their arrival in the New World. A shocking example of this mistreatment was seen just a few years ago.

4.3 "Space Traders": The abduction of the "African" consciousness

The sudden change in weather and the sinking of the island in Bell's "Afrolantica Awakening" bear an uncanny resemblance to the events in summer of 2005 when bad weather almost sunk New Orleans. Hurricane Katrina, which hit New Orleans on 29 August, 2005 destroyed thousands of homes and uncovered the continuing racial division that exists within America. At first, the mainstream media did not mention the issue of racial division, which was only brought into open debate after rapper Kanye West declared at a Katrina fundraiser declared that "George Bush doesn't care about black people"[16]. In Legendary K.O's rap song "George Bush Doesn't Care About Us", the rapper reiterates the words of Kanya West but, more importantly, exposes the continuing problem of institutionalized racism:

[16] Cited from, The New York Times, August 16, 2005.

If FEMA really comes through in an emergency
But nobody seem to have a sense of urgency
Now the mayor's been reduced to crying
I guess Bush said, Niggas been used to dying!

He said, "I know it looks bad, just have to wait"
Forgetting folks who broke to evacuate
Niggas starving and they dying of thirst
I bet he had to go and check on them refineries first.

Legendary K.O's rap song, gives a modern perspective on Du Bois' double consciousness in which blacks reevaluate their existence behind the veil, a veil that seemed to be rapidly unveiling itself prior to the hurricane. In the song, there are clear signs of the prevailing racial divisions between black and whites, even at the highest institutional level. The reference to FEMA (Federal Emergency Management Board), which is a governmental "emergency" management organization that assists the American public, did not act with utmost professionalism or a "sense of urgency" during the disaster and left thousands of blacks in peril. New Orleans, Mayor C. Ray Nagin, continuously urged the Bush government to order federal organizations such as FEMA to aid the victims as soon as possible, but help arrived much later than Nagin and the largely black New Orleans citizens would have hoped for**.** This high-level negligence re-ignited the question of whether Americans were still split along racial lines and whether blacks were still considered second-class citizens. If the answer to this question is "yes", then the events proceeding Hurricane Katrina were not so unusual in light of racial discrimination. As Legendary K.O raps: "I guess Bush said, Niggas been used to dying!" With thousands displaced and crying for assistance, Bush was occupied with more important issues, such as "check[ing] on them refineries first". Though the disaster was devastating for the black citizens of New Orleans, the truth was that it also increased

white corporate wealth, as stated by Lee Sustar in his article "Hurricane Katrina Exposes Racism and Inequality":

> But climate disaster can be profitable--if you happen to be a stockholder or executive for a major U.S. oil company. The oil giants were set to use the excuse of Katrina to hike gas prices still further beyond the record pump prices set last month (countercurrents.com/sustar).

Thus, even in times of great despair, the main issue for some is not concern for the victims, but an interest in capital gain. The fact that blacks were largely excluded from early rescue efforts only strengthened the argument that African Americans in this particular region have been ignored because they are not profitable contributors to the American economy. (As we shall see in the following chapter, when black Americans do become profitable, they suddenly are no longer ignored).

During the hurricane rescue efforts the media often referred to black Americans as "refugees", which gave rise to heated discussions and arguments as to why the media would suggest this in the first place. To refer to black Americans as refugees suggested that blacks were not American citizens which was shocking in a millennium in which the color-line was slowly becoming less evident in American society. In Public Enemy's "Hell No We Ain't All Right", the rap group not only condemns the strategies employed during Hurricane Katrina, and the racial divisions in America evoked by the word "refugee":

Now I see we be the new faces of refugees, who ain't even overseas
But stuck here on our knees
Forget the plasma TV, ain't no electricity
New world's upside down and out of order.

Public Enemy realize how the fading of the color-line between blacks and whites never really happened. He uses the media reference to "refugees" to explicitly protest at how whites still, in this modern world, see blacks as outsiders. As Public Enemy point out, the word "refugee" implies that blacks are still seen as people from "overseas". To understand why the blacks were labeled as refugees and why the black community felt such a sense of rage and abandonment as echoed in Public Enemy's song, can be found in Liisa Malkki's definition of the word "refugee":

> People who, because they live in impoverished, war-torn, or undemocratic states, become the victims of famine, violence, and persecution and are forced to seek asylum in other countries. And when they do, they become a "problem" for asylum states and international agencies such as the Red Cross or the UN Refugee Agency. In contrast to "ordinary people", refugees are constituted as an anomaly (Malkki, 8).

The word "problem" is also a stigma attached to blacks because, as history has recorded, ever since their arrival in America, blacks have been considered by white Americans to be a problem.

Rose Weitz claims that the history of blacks in New Orleans has always been one of struggle. Most blacks there work in the lowest positions and, as seen in the televised coverage of Hurricane Katrina, live below the poverty line[17]. Weitz continues:

> New Orleans history was built on a legacy of slavery, racial segregation, and racial discrimination. Virtually since its founding, poor African Americans were relegated to housing in low-lying areas near the coast, where flooding was most likely (Weitz, 49).

[17] Sixty-seven percent of New Orleans' residents are black. And huge numbers of them poor. Nearly 30 percent of people in New Orleans live below the poverty line, and only a handful of large American cities have lower household incomes than the Big Easy. For young, distressed Katrina victims, it's even worse: Only Mississippi next door has a higher child poverty rate than Louisiana. According to estimates, half of all children in Louisiana live in poverty. (Bob Faw, NBC News, Sept. 1, 2005)

From the very beginning, the black community of New Orleans has been veiled because of their second-class status and up until Hurricane Katrina hit the city most of the public where unaware of their plight. Most people imagined New Orleans to be a thriving city, with a cosmopolitan society that has grown out of the success of Jazz and Blues for which New Orleans is famous for. Not all American people, however, were ignorant of the fact that blacks lived under such impoverished conditions. George Bush's mother, Barbara Bush, claimed that blacks were now better off. Her statement in The New York Times reads: "And so many of the people in the [sports] arena here, you know, were underprivileged anyway" (New York Times, 2005). Although Barbara Bush denied allegations that racism slowed aid to the Katrina victims, her words do reveal that most blacks exist under harsh conditions and that white authorities knew that the black citizens of New Orleans were "underprivileged". The aftermath of the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina only confirmed Bell's words that "Blacks are the faces at the bottom of the well".

The televised images of Hurricane Katrina showed the blacks as "boat people" and "refugees" sheltering in football stadiums and tents, even getting help from the "Red Cross" who generally only help overseas refugees. This was a problem that faced blacks, but as suggested earlier, it was also a problem for the whites. The black "problem" an the way in which African Americans are seen as a burden on the whites is cleverly illustrated in Bell's short story "The Space Traders". The Space Traders are aliens that come from some far off planet and arrive at the shores of America with an offer that will solve all the problems America is facing. The aliens offer "gold" to help the deplorable economy,

"special chemicals" to eradicate pollution, and "nuclear fuel" to replace depleted fossil fuels. In exchange for all these resources, the aliens request that the government give them in return all their black citizens. The President is in a dilemma, whether to accept the offer which would prove that equality never existed within America, or to decline it which would suggest to the blacks that all races in America exist under one nation. The offer made by the aliens to the President is similar to the situation of Hurricane Katrina that caused a dilemma for President Bush: to prove immediate aid and to show black Americans that he is not a racist and views all American citizens, regardless of race and color, as one, or listen to the white millionaires who want to make more profit at the expense of the black community. In Bell's story, the cabinet decide that this offer is too good to refuse and "indeed, the ultimate solution to the nation's troubles" (Bell, 162). The story ends with the blacks boarding the alien's space ship.

The decision by the cabinet to trade blacks as a solution to the ongoing problems in America is justified by evoking the concept of patriotism:

> All Americans are expected to make sacrifices for the good of the country. Black people are no exceptions to this basic obligation of citizenship. Their role may be special, but so is that of many of those who serve. The role of that blacks may be called on to play in response to the Space Traders offer is, however regrettable, neither immoral nor unconstitutional (Bell, 188).

The idea of patriotism is ironic because blacks in America have never felt or been given the opportunity to really feel a sense of patriotism within American society. With all the suffering experienced by blacks because of racist white Americans the word patriotism should be erased and replaced with the word desertion. The word "unconstitutional" is also ironic and takes us back to the demand in X-Clan's song to "burn the Constitution".

The argument of the cabinet that it is not unconstitutional to sacrifice the terms of the American Constitution if it is for the good of the country, but if the constitution is not going to protect the rights of the black citizens, then why should the black population sacrifice themselves for it when they have never experienced the purpose of it – equality. They are no longer slaves but they are still treated as inferior to the whites. To quote Talib Kweli again, from his song "African Dream":

We stand over the Atlantic, looking broad like a man's shoulders
The fire is trapped in a belly, ready to pop like canned soda
We outlasting, from middle passage
Touched down in New York
Cincinnatay! Big Ohio status what you thought
Money it's classic these bastards try to treat us like cattle
So life has been a constant battle, battle
Rising above the crabs in the barrel
Way used to living in deaths shadow.

The duty of blacks as patriots and their allegiance to American should also be reconsidered after their betrayal by the government in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina.

The media images of blacks boarding boats after the hurricane had devastated New Orleans are similar to the blacks in Bell's "The Space Traders" boarding the alien ship. In both cases, the blacks are the victims of institutionalized racism. Although there have been advances in black development within American society, there are always certain forces, often white racist institutions, that halt the progress of blacks. This was true now as it was when Du Bois wrote:

> Those whites who most vehemently tell the Negro to develop his own classes and social institutions, have no plan or desire for such help. First of all, and often deliberately, they curtail the education and cultural advantage of the black folk and they do this because they are not convinced of the cultural identity or gift of Negroes and have no hope nor wish that the mass of Negroes can be raised even as far as the mass of whites have been (Du Bois, 190).

As the events in New Orleans show and as Bell's stories imply, the whites are still gazing down on the blacks, and this is the reason why blacks such as Bell and the RNA planned and hoped to leave white America and form a new land, as refugees from a racist America. It was this "Promised Land" that provided blacks with hope: to regain some of their lost Africa, to revisit their culture, to exist without the double consciousness, and finally to unveil themselves without carrying the burden of racism.

Chapter 5

GANGSTA RAP: VIOLENCE AND OPULENCE

> To take part in the American revolution it is not enough to write a revolutionary song; you must fashion the revolution with the people. And if you fashion it with the people, the songs will come by themselves, and of themselves…In order to achieve the real action, you must yourself be a living part of Africa and of her thought, you must be an element of that popular energy which is entirely called for the freeing, the progress, and the happiness of Africa. There is no place outside that fight for the artist or for the intellectual who is not himself concerned with and completely at one with the people in the great battle of Africa and of all suffering humanity.
>
> Sekou Toure, cited in Frantz Fanon's *Wretched of the Earth*

Du Bois' concept of double consciousness is a production of what he calls a "twoness": an American and a Negro. The twoness he speaks of is also found in the compound word African-American, where there is a separation of the two words and two worlds: Africa and America. The black man is suffering because he cannot reconcile the twoness and he does not know which part of the twoness he belongs to. The hyphenation between "African" and "American" also draws attention to Du Bois' idea of the color-line, since this line or hyphenation symbolizes the double consciousness which exists in hip hop.

As seen in Chapter II, conscious rappers, especially during the golden years of rap, wanted to produce rap lyrics that would educate and teach the black community about their lost African history and bring with it a "Proud to be Black" motto to inspire and

maintain a positive awareness of themselves within a white-dominated society. In spite of these efforts of conscious rappers to teach and promote African culture, hip hop was creating a new form of rap called gangsta rap. Like all rappers of the hip hop generation, gangsta rappers possess a double consciousness because their roots lie in Africa and America. What differentiates these rappers from the others, however, is the often abusive hardcore "in your face" lyrics which articulate the years of brutality against blacks, which gangsta rappers have directed towards their own black community.

5.1 "100 Miles and Runnin": Victims of Institutionalized Violence

Brutality has been a part of black African history since their arrival in the New World. This brutality was experienced first on slave ships by slave controllers, then on plantations by overseers, and then on the streets of modern-day America by law-enforcers. Part of the reason for this institutionalized aggression towards African Americans is the media, which usually portrays them as thugs, drug-dealers, and murderers. It is such prejudices that have deepened and perpetuated the color-line and have become a pretext for placing blame on blacks as the cause of all problems existing within society. Rapper MC Ren, in the song "100 Miles and Runnin'", is aware of this growing division between whites and blacks: "Since I'm stereotyped to kill and destruct/ I don't give a fuck". The whites do not see African Americans for what they are or what they have to offer. Instead, they are hidden behind a veil of prejudice and are marginalized and subjugated by whites who see them as a dangerous minority to be controlled by any means necessary, but usually by force.

In their song “Fuck the Police”, N.W.A (Niggaz With Attitudes) express their anger at how the law protectors have no commitment to protect the blacks but only to harass them:

Fuck the police
Comin’ straight from the underground
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.

The rhyme “authority” and “minority” clearly shows the persecution felt by the black urban youth. This anger against the police escalates in one particular line of the song in which MC Ren rhymes, “Taking out a police would make my day.” The rhyme “take” and “make” suggests a very simple, yet very explicit appetite to kill. At the same time, the concept of double consciousness emerges in the rapper’s eagerness to kill an officer in the way that Dirty Harry would go about it. In the film “Dirty Harry”, the hero, a white police officer played by Clint Eastwood – a famous white actor – has no respect for the law and goes about finding and killing those who have inflicted violent acts upon innocent others. This reference to Dirty Harry draws attention to the black rapper who envisages himself as a white hero who has similar intentions to that of Dirty Harry: to go and find the “bad guys” and kill them. For MC Ren, ironically, the villains are the law protectors and like the famous quote from Dirty Harry, “Go ahead, make my day”, the rapper is saying, in effect, “If you attempt to shoot, I will shoot you first,” only for the rapper the person about to shoot him is not a criminal but a police officer.

Ice T’s song, “Cop Killer”, considered to be one of the most controversial songs in gangsta rap history, lambasts the police in a more brash, more categorical fashion:

Cop killer, better you than me
Cop killer, fuck police brutality!
Cop killer, I know your family's grievin' (fuck 'em)
Cop killer, but tonight we get even.

This song, which was banned from air play, goes straight to the core of street brutality and institutional racism, bordering on ethnic cleansing. This rage against the police, which rap lyrics viciously express, serve as a reminder of the extreme anger simmering within the black community as a result of the long years of racist law enforcers. When they were slaves, for example, African Americans were executed by plantation owners not just for murder and rape, but for the far lesser crimes of burglary, arson and assault upon a white person. This was because these owners, who were the law, believed that such severe discipline would make the slaves too scared to rebel. No longer slaves of the field, gangsta rappers decided to retaliate. They did so by becoming the "bad niggas", a phrase which derives from the days of slavery when black slaves challenged the white authority on plantations. The same phrase is deployed today in order to represent "the black person who refuses to submit to the rules of society, who is fearless and unruly, and who laughs at rules of appropriateness and social regulation" (Perry, 29).

5.2 "Black Nigga Killa"[18]: Destroying the "African" -American

The violent lyrics of these "fearless and unruly" "bad niggas", who turned their anger on the oppressor, played a major role in the rapid growth of gangsta rap's popularity and was the cause of a large new cult following. Wealthy corporations realized this set about turning gangsta rap into a billion dollar industry. They did so by creating and promoting a universal concept for gangsta rap – violence – that would guarantee the sale of the product. Instead of educating African Americans about the injustices of institutionalized

[18] This is a title of a song by Bone-Thugs and Harmony.

violence, gangsta rappers and especially their new overseers, corporate industries, thrived on using violence as a way to capitalize on its popularity. The “bad niggas” became the “nasty niggas”, and gangsta rap created a gangsta world that glorified thuggery, guns and murder.

Rappers were no longer interested in educating their own community and withdrew most of their anger against white authorities such as the police. Instead, they relished rhyming lyrics of violence that celebrated murder, not against whites or the police, but towards their own people. Violence has now become an integral part of rap lyrics and is so common that the public not expect anything less. Violence has thus become a brand, and to sell it there must be an element to it that brings the consumers back to buy it. This element is extreme violence, and with it gangsta rap has created a shock effect of the sort described by Walter Benjamin in *The Author as Producer*. Using Dada artists as his example, Benjamin discusses how "the work of art of the Dadaists became an instrument of ballistics. It hit the spectator like a bullet, it happened to him, thus acquiring a tactile quality. Dadaists frustrated the pleasurable desire of art by making their artworks utterly undecipherable. Stringing obscenities into a poem, their art was to outrage the public through a relentless destruction of the aura of their creations." (Benjamin, 20-21) This is exactly the aim of gangsta rap.

Gangsta rappers compose lyrics that “outrage the public” including parents, government officials, feminists and other organizations. Gangsta rap has distilled so much violence in order to attract and satisfy millions of consumers who expect the destruction of the “aura”

of their creations. This violence, however, does not just destroy their art form – rap – but their own people. Benjamin's concept of shock is embedded in numerous rap lyrics that exploit violence in the most shocking way. One example is Tupac's "Hit Em Up" in which an unapologetic voice raps explicitly about despising and murdering his once great friend, now arch-rival, Notorious B.I.G:

Grab your glocks when you see 2pac
Call the cops when you see 2pac, uh
Who shot me,
But your punks didn't finish
Now you 'bout to feel the wrath of a menace
Nigga, I hit 'em up…
Why you fucking with me?
I'm a self made millionaire
Thug livin' out of prison
Pistols in the air (Ha Ha) …
Five shots couldn't drop me
I took it and smiled
Now I'm back to set the record straight
With my A-K
I'm still the thug you love to hate
Mother-fucker I'll Hit 'Em Up.

Tupac was once considered a conscious rapper, but because many of his later songs contained violent lyrics, he is now seen as little more than a gangster. His bitter rivalry with Notorious B.I.G was fuelled by hatred and contested war on each other over petty issues such as whether rap was more dominant in the West Coast or East Coast America. Tupac was from the former, Notorious B.I.G from the latter. Although both artists helped popularize rap, their extreme need for violence with "pistols" and "A-K's" ("glocks") was the reason for both of their untimely deaths. This preoccupation with violence is notoriously exemplified in the chorus of Juvenile's song "Fuck That Nigga":

Man, pop that nigga
Man, kill that bitch
Man, shoot that nigga
Man, spank that bitch
Man, down the nigga, execute that bitch

Put fifty rounds in that nigga is what'cha do that bitch.

As seen above, the most important vehicle for hip hop during those years was its violent lyrics, but unlike its predecessors, the main consumers were white youths, not black youths. White hip hop activist Brian Bender explains the allure for white youth:

> Most of us have never been to the inner city … We enjoy the culture of fear that has been created around the inner city. We are titillated by the violent images presented to us. They are characters that have been created for our perverse enjoyment and we eat it up, only vaguely aware that our country's economic discrepancies are being fuelled by a fear of the ghettos that is fed to us through popular culture (Bender, 12).

It is true that a host of media such as cinema, television and computer games have all played a role in the escalation of violence in American society, and gangsta rap should not be the scapegoat for it. However, the explicit glorification of violence in gangsta rap makes it difficult for it not to be seen as a key player. Moreover, gangsta rap appeals to the masses and feeds a craving for violence that so many fans of gangsta rap seem to have. Consumers, frequently white youths, desire a life that provides constant adrenalin, the thrill of unknown dangers of inner city life that includes dodging bullets like modern day cowboys, and the fantasy of living a gangsta life epitomized by mafia godfathers.

Gangsta rappers have not only lost their cultural identity because of this branding of violence as a marketing tool, but have fallen into a gangsta culture that has no moral standard and no respect for each other as African Americans. Instead, gangsta rappers ridicule their culture and, most shocking of all, take pleasure in killing off their own race. Gangsta rapper DMX recognizes the mass appeal of violence and glorifies it in his song, "Bring Your Whole Crew":

I got blood on my hands and there's no remorse
And got blood on my dick 'cause I fucked a corpse
I'm a nasty nigga when you pass me nigga look me in my eyes
Tell me my fuckin' face that you ready to die
You be a dead motherfucker, red motherfucker
Don't be stupid, you heard what I said motherfucker
Who shot you? Aw nigga, like you don't know …

But if you've been thinking about that shit you did
You wouldn't have brought the joint wit u kid
Now I might have to get u kid and split your wig wit a machedi
I bring beef to niggaz and string them out like spaghetti.

These lyrics glorify the butchering of individuals and the slaying of children. DMX shows "no remorse" even towards the dead, necrophilia being possibly one of the most depraved acts one can carry out. The message here is clear: mess with this gangsta rapper and you will pay the ultimate price. Like many gangsta rap songs, the discourse of violence is extreme, and it seems that this is what the consumer wants. What this suggests is that gangsta rap has become a kind of fashion accessory, a brand name created by a corporation and not something authentically black. Although listeners have adopted violence as a result of these violent lyrics, it will remain within this genre because this is what sells.

4.3 "The Chain Remains"[19]: From Iron to Platinum

In critically evaluating hip hop in general, one of the key questions is that of purpose. Is the artist engaging in a form of production for the purpose of commercial gain, and if so, how is this affecting the social and cultural expression in hip hop and the black diaspora in general? What has transpired in rap over the last decade is an increasingly excessive reference to capitalist ideals and the rejection of what made rap so unique before the prevailing economic splurge took it over. To this day gangsta rap still relies on the

[19] This is a title of a song by Naughty by Nature.

commercial distribution of lyrics and portrays gangsta life, criminality, bling bling (to be discussed in the following sub-section) and misogyny to perpetuate its highly successful and highly lucrative brand of consumerism.

As Mark Anthony Neal writes:

> In less than a decade, Hip Hop culture has been transformed from a subculture primarily influenced by the responses of black urban youth to post-industrialization into a billion dollar industry in which such responses were exploited by corporate capitalist and petit bourgeois desires [and interests]". (Neal, 150) As a result of this capitalist exploitation, hip hop has become "increasingly disconnected from the real communal history of the African American diaspora (Neal, 194).

The social, cultural, historical and ethical dimensions of hip hop have been replaced by naked commercialism. What used to be an arena for people who shared a common social conscience has instead been taken over by the branding industry. According to Bakari Kitwana, the hip hop generation, with some exceptions, is comprised of self-consumed individuals who have no interest in the conscious rap that was a forum for knowledge, education and protest: "Achieving wealth by any means necessary is more important than most anything else, hence our obsession with the materialistic and consumer trappings of financial success" (Kitwana, 6). This fixation on profit has turned rap music into a product of mass distribution that has lost the cultural inspiration and originality it once possessed. In his song, "I Used to Love H.E.R" rapper Common personifies rap and describes how it has lost its creativity and become mainstream through the exploitation of the culture industry:

> I might've failed to mention that this chick was creative
> But once the man got to her, he altered the native
> Told her if she got an image and a gimmick
> that she could make money, and she did it like a dummy
> Now I see her in commercials, she's universal
> She used to only swing it with the inner-city circle
> Now she be in the burbs lickin rock and dressin hip
> And on some dumb shit, when she comes to the city

Talkin about poppin glocks servin rocks and hittin switches
Now she's a gangsta rollin with gangsta bitches
I see niggaz slammin her, and takin her to the sewer
But I'm a take her back hopin that the shit stop
Cause who I'm talkin bout y'all is hip-hop.

In the first two lines, Common raps two words that are critical in understanding the double consciousness. The words "creative" and "native" explain the separation of the color-line. The rapper states that hip hop was at its best when it functioned as a vehicle to express creative lyrics that instilled black pride within black consciousness and it was the "native", the originality and authenticity of African-American music, the "native" that aspired to resurrect the African consciousness. Despite the originality of "native", Common posits a despairing crisis that divides the black consciousness, the authenticity of the "native" which has been "altered" and removed because of the gangsta rappers' prostitution of their art. This can be seen in the rhyme, "I see niggaz slammin' her" depicts the bitter downfall of hip hop and the loss of black consciousness. The phrase delineates hip hop as a whore, who has been raped and abused by the white corporations and the black gangsta rappers. Although the rapper criticizes the path hip hop has taken, the fact that he wants to "take her back" suggests that, in hip hop's defence, "once the man got you" the power of the culture industry was just too great to resist.

The power of the culture industry is fundamental to the process of mass production and relying on economical strategies it has generated a rapid downfall of hip hop's authenticity in the detrimental downfall of hip hop authenticity. In their book *Dialectic of Enlightenment,* Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno describe the culture industry as a systematic uniformity of forms of art, especially those which thrive on mass production.

They also argue that the culture industry is a combination of mass production and monopoly:

> Under monopoly all mass culture is identical, and the lines of its artificial framework begin to show through. The people at the top are no longer so interested in concealing monopoly: as its violence becomes more open, so its power grows. Movies and radio need no longer pretend to be art. The truth that they are just business is made into an ideology in order to justify the rubbish they deliberately produce. They call themselves industries; and when their directors' incomes are published, any doubt about the social utility of the finished product is removed (Horkheimer and Adorno, 121).

The structure of the culture industry is readily apparent. The power of the industry is controlled by corporations and fuelled by the millions of buying consumers. In order to supply and match the demand for the product reproduction processes are implemented. As a result of this, the originality of the art form is lost and replaced by artificiality. This is precisely the case with gangsta rap. Hip hop no longer carries with it the authenticity it once possessed as conscious rap group, The Roots, makes clear:

> Yo, yo, lost generation, fast paced nation,
> World population confront the frustration
> The principals of true hip-hop have been forsaken
> It's all contractual and about money making
> Pretend to be cats don't seem to know their limitations
> Exact replication and false representation.

In this song, "What They Do", The Roots argue that the current generation of black youth has become less conscious of social problems within their own society and more interested in the "fast paced", fast-food society that has no time to stop and contemplate important issues that surround them. As Trisha McQuillar observes, America has become obsessed with everyday convenience: "The result is that we are sacrificing the arts to the gods of crass commercialism in exchange for the illusion of ease". (McQuillar, 138)

The sacrifice of the arts that McQuillar speaks of is currently endangering hip hop as a whole, because its originality and aesthetic quality have been pushed aside for marketing gains. In the quoted verse from "What They Do", the rhyme "replication" and "representation" echo the concept of artificiality as argued by Horkheimer and Adorno. The Roots believe that gangsta rap has become an imitation of an imitation. The essence of rap that once provided the voice for black education and progress is no longer part of the hip hop genre. Mass production has single-handedly destroyed what many conscious rappers aspired to do: to raise black consciousness. Because of the huge commercial success of gangsta rap, conscious rappers have been largely silenced by it, as bell hooks avers:

> All African-American engagement in the performing arts, whether through the staged performance of poetry and plays, or through rap, risks losing its power to disrupt and engage with the specific locations from which it emerges via a process of commodification that requires reproduction in a marketable package. As mass product, live performance can rarely address the local in a meaningful way, because the primacy of addressing the local is sacrificed to the desire to engage a wider audience of paying consumers (hooks, 200).

For decades now, the single aim of gangsta rap has been to produce countless songs containing lyrics of a negative nature that generate profit but produce no positive reflection on black consciousness. Chuck D agrees that mass production is the reason for hip hop's downfall:

> The low road is easier to walk upon as a recording artist. A lot of rapper's wouldn't get the time of day from recording producers if they weren't doing negative rap. There's a system that benefits from this. White corporations out there make a lot of money from rap; then they go off to their well-established communities, and black people are the causalities of the day (Chuck D, 21).

This exploitation of blackness at the hands of white corporations has been given a helping hand by the rappers themselves who have been manipulated by the industry to rap and act

in a way that will most profit the industry. This form of exploitation is a modern equivalent to life on the plantation: white corporations are the new masters and overseers, and the new slaves are gangsta rappers. This master-slave relation bears all the markings of the *Willie Lynch Letter: The Making of a Slave*. Lynch was a slave owner in the West Indies, who came to the colony of Virginia in 1712 to teach slave owners there his method of turning Africans into slaves. Here is an excerpt from the letter:

> Let us make a slave. What do we need? First of all, we need a black nigger man, a pregnant nigger woman and her baby nigger boy. Second, we will use the same basic principle that we use in breaking a horse, combined with some more sustaining factors. What we do with horses is that we break them from one form of life to another; that is, we reduce them from their natural state in nature. Whereas nature provides them with the natural capacity to take care of their offspring, we break that natural string of independence from them and thereby create a dependency status, so that we may be able to get from them useful production for our business and pleasure.
> (http://www.Willie-Lynch-letter-The-Making-of-a-Slave)

The hip hop industry and those in charge of mainstream rap are deeply connected with the suggestions made by Lynch, because gangsta rappers have split from their natural state which is African, and now that they have independence, they produce for the "business and pleasure" of the white culture industry. The only difference here is that the rappers are also profiting from the production. Instead of being inspirational black men who could educate their black brothers, they have moved from the African side of double consciousness to the American side. In order to be part of the white, wealthy, American elite, gangsta rappers have torn the veil and distanced themselves from their cultural roots in the pursuit of wealth. Ice Cube highlights the problem in his song "True To The Game":

Moving out your neighborhood
But I walk through the ghetto and the flavor's good
Little kids jumping on me

But you, you wanna be white and corny
Living way out
"Nigger go home" spray-painted on your house
Trying to be White or a Jew
But ask yourself, who are they to be equal to?
Get the hell out
Stop being an Uncle Tom, you little sell-out
House nigga scum
Give something back.

This verse is a reminder of how hip hop and rappers have fallen into the hands of the capitalist regime and brought with it the downfall of a vital form of African-American musical expression. Unlike the plantation community who utilized a creative expression of music to voice their personal struggle against their owners and the slave trade, gangsta rappers have chosen to promote struggles within their own community for the benefit of multi-million-dollar white corporations that want to profit from the black community. The rapper has thus become the modern rap slave, and as willing slaves of capitalism, gangsta rappers have become slaves to consumerism. To quote McQuillar: “A beautiful cultural art form has been manipulated to make us slaves once again, this time donning platinum instead of iron chains” (McQuillar, 137).

5.4 Bling Bling, Bling Bling: Crossing over to White Consciousness

The “beautiful cultural art form of rap” and its original role as educator of the black community has been removed from mainstream popular culture and replaced by gangsta rap. This genre of rappers has no interest in educating the masses, or rapping about African American history, or creating lyrics which depict the struggles of black Africans and disseminate black consciousness. With its massive commercialization of hip hop, gangsta rap has caused a huge deterioration in the cultural advancement of the black diaspora, and with the increase of gangsta rappers in the music industry, who only strive

to be part of the wealthy white social elite of America, it will be very difficult to restore it.

Instead of black cultural advancement, gangsta rappers have become a part of white cultural hegemony. According to Antonio Gramsci, cultural hegemony is an ideological dominance of society in which the subordinate levels of society allow the ruling class to exercise social and economic dominance, with the consent of the subordinate classes in support of what they are told is the common good (www.theory.co.uk/Gramsci). In the case of gangsta rappers, who are the subordinate class, it is the common good of profit which has lured them into a world of plenty and so sells their souls to the white cultural elite. More disturbing, is that in desiring to be part of the dominant elite, gangsta rappers have allowed not only themselves to be exploited but also their culture and community, all in the name of capital gain. To achieve these goals, gangsta rappers have allowed their own music to be manipulated and distorted, and have sacrificed hip hop's originality on the altar of capitalism.

Many of today's gangsta rappers represent these capitalistic aspirations and are the cause of the rapid downfall of what rap originally represented. Gangsta rappers market images of the most indulgent materialistic commodities and something they have coined as a life of "bling bling". Bling bling, a phrase that was introduced into rap vocabulary by Lil' Wayne, refers to expensive jewellery (also referred to as "ice" in rap vocabulary) and other fashion accessories. It also refers to the entire lifestyle built around excessive

spending and ostentation. Nelly, in his song "Pimp Juice", promotes the lifestyle of the rich and famous by rhyming about how good he has it:

> I'm in that seventy-four Coup DeVille,
> With the power seats, leather wood on my wheel,
> One touch sunroof ("BOOP!") leave it alone
> Hoes see it, can't believe it - It's goin back on it's own
> Ooooooooooooooooh, shit, that's the way we do it baby
> Every day like this? Seven days...

This fascination with fast expensive cars or what rappers refer to as their "rides" is something that is embedded in gangsta rap, and the youth of today expect their rappers to ride in something outrageous: vehicles with big rims, explosive sound system and an original coating that nobody has seen before.[20] In his song, Nelly provides details about what his vehicle has to offer and is aware that the luxury vehicles he owns are envied not just by "hoes", meaning women, but by other rappers and all black and white Americans in general. Similarly, rap group Big Tymers, in their song "Big Ballin", rap about "New cars, Pretty broads, Neighbourhood superstar/Car Shinna, 20 inch rida". As these lyrics suggest, all rappers must own and flaunt themselves in their vehicles. If it is bigger, has more gadgets and is audaciously expensive, then it will also assist in keeping those rappers in the limelight.

This obsession with wealth and "bling bling" has always driven popular culture. For instance, the show "Lifestyles of the Rich and Famous", which aired from 1984-95, featured the life of rich millionaires, from wealthy entertainers to business moguls. This show rarely showcased black entertainers, and only in the last decade or so have they

[20] This vehicle modification and ostentation is similar to "Pimp My Ride", a popular MTV show presented by gangsta rapper Xzibit. The whole point of the show is simply to take an old run down vehicle and then transform it into something sensational and original.

become popular icons, recognized worldwide for their fame, but also their fortune. Today, television shows such as such as "E news" and "The Fabulous Life" constantly feature black millionaire entertainers such as Oprah Winfrey, Denzel Washington, Will Smith, Chris Rock and Jamie Foxx. In the same category as these black entertainers are a host of gangsta rappers who themselves have become millionaires and have become famous because of their wealth. They have all the possessions that any white millionaire could possibly own, and many of these rappers are featured in MTV's show "Cribs", where celebrities invite camera crews into their lives so viewers can be awed by the massive all-inclusive mansions which feature swimming pools, triple garages, latest state-of-the-art devices, massaging beds, gold-plated toilets and cinema/theatre inside the house. Although these gangsta rappers have exceeded beyond their wildest dreams, they are not satisfied with becoming black millionaires. They want to be known as American millionaires, and to be recognized alongside all the famous white moguls of American society: "Donald Trump, Bill Gates, and Bill Clinton, white men who have played the game successfully, are often appreciated in depoliticized form as role models for street players in hip hop" (Perry, 124).

Jay Z exemplifies the desire of many gangsta rappers to achieve the billionaire status of white business icons. His music company, Roc-a-fella Records, is named after John D. Rockefeller, the first American billionaire at the time, and the world's richest man. In his song "Money, Cash, Hoes", Jay Z reiterates this lust for money and the quest to be part of the "American Dream":

Money cash hoes money cash hoes (WHAT)
Money cash hoes money cash hoes (UHH)

Money cash hoes money cash hoes (COME ON)
Money cash hoes (WHAT) hoes (WHAT) hoes (WHAT)

Flavors robust platinum and gold touch
Y'all rap now, fast money lets slow it up
Niggaz try to stop Jay-Z to no luck
Roc-A-Fella foreva CEO what what
Us the villains, fuck your feelings
While yall playa hate we in the upper millions …

In these verses, there is an important insight into how Jay Z perceives himself within his own double consciousness. The half rhyme "villains" and "feelings" reveals how he is aware of having crossed over from his own African consciousness to the white American consciousness, and is proud of having done so because that's were the money lies. Without remorse he is willing to proclaim that gangsta rappers have destroyed the African consciousness. Other songs of his such as "Big Pimpin", "Diamond is Forever", "Fuck All Nite" and "Mo' Money" have played a significant part in the erosion of genuine hip hop and clearly demonstrate how he and many gangsta rappers have exploited themselves, their culture and their black consciousness all for the purpose of making millions.

Chapter 6

CONCLUSION

The Conscious Resistance

Yo, where the teachers went, with all that pro-black shit?
Where all the conscious niggas, who used to chat like this?
See, I remember yesterday when y'all was Gods and Earths
Egyptians and metaphysicists on the verge of giving birth
To understanding, and planting seeds that grow
Now everybody's on that bullshit about killing and so
Eat my pussy, suck my dick, well that's the size of the shit
So in the head of ignorance, I rip some conscious clip
(Poor Righteous Teachers, "Conscious Style")

Despite the massive popularity of gangsta rap and the commercial injection that has all but eliminated the conscious rap scene, there have always been conscious rappers who resisted the capitalist temptation. These rappers are the missionaries who, in spite of the power of the culture industry, are protecting the genre and the black community. Conscious rappers are fully aware of hip hop's enslavement to the new capitalist overseer. For example, in their song "I am, I be", De La Soul rhyme: "I am Posdonus I be the new generation of slaves/ Here to make papes to buy a record executive rakes".

The lyrics are plain: the rapper, "Posdonus", considers himself to be a slave to commerce because his rhymes lead to mass production, the sale of albums and profits. Although his songs ("papes") give him a share in album sales, it does not come close to the profits raked in by corporate business. The most important facet of the song, however, is in the

title – "I am, I be" suggesting a striking contrast to Descartes' concept, cogito ergo sum, "I think therefore I am". Descartes argued that the act of thinking guarantees the existence of the self, but since gangsta rappers are only consumed with the desire for wealth, hardly ever rhyming lyrics about black history and their black consciousness, they really do not know anything about their true selves. This is because that the self has been consumed by capitalism. By rapping solely for the mainstream music industry and boosting the profits of corporate business, gangsta rappers have forgotten their black history and lost their self-identity.

Ice Cube's "True To The Game" deals explicitly with this crossover from conscious rap to mainstream rap, and how this process has contributed to the deterioration of African culture:

> You was hardcore hip-hop
> Now look at yourself, you done flip-flopped
> Giving our music away to the mainstream
> Don't you know they ain't down with the team
> They just sent they boss over
> Put a bug in your ear and now you crossed over
> On MTV but they don't care
> They'll have a nigga next year.

Ice Cube's lyrics are directed solely at gangsta rappers who have succumbed to the capitalist ideology. The word "flip-flopped" is instrumental in analysing the double consciousness of conscious and gangsta rap. Conscious rappers have played a large part in keeping unity with the black community and resisting "slavery", even though they are part of the music industry. Gangsta rappers, on the other hand, are part of the monopoly described by Horkheimer and Adorno that thrives on mass production and in the process, have lost their authenticity**.** In this shift from the real to the false, from something original

to an imitation, gangsta rappers have lost contact with their roots. Ice Cube also recognizes that countless brands come and go, and that an artist who raps only for profit will be forgotten in the long run because the corporations will find another "nigga next year".

There is a very distinctive argument in hip hop: whether to resist capitalism and stay "real", or play a part in the American dream and kill the original dream of hip hop and with it the demise of this music genre. Todd Boyd questions the role of double identity in hip hop and whether or not this double consciousness is in conflict or whether it can ever work together:

> Ultimately, hip hop's concern with cultural identity has been about affirming authenticity, in what would otherwise be considered a postmodern, technologically driven, media-dominated, artificial world. To "keep it real" means to remain true to what is assumed to be the dictate's of one's cultural identity. Although there are very strict rules in regard to what counts as being real, this quest for authenticity often translates to one person's perception in the marketplace. It also has to do with ones relationship for capital. Can hip hop serve two masters? Is it possible for hip hop to remain true to its roots, and at the same time still be popular? (Boyd, 19).

In response to Boyd's question, one needs to understand that the double consciousness of the African American is almost a schizophrenic experience since the black rapper is in a state of confusion with respect to which consciousness best suit him in a world saturated by capitalism. In his song "Moment of Clarity", Jay Z questions both double consciousness and whether it is possible, as Boyd asks, to "serve two masters". The authenticity of hip hop and "keeping it real" is often overwhelmed by capitalist norms that almost guarantee that gangsta rappers will become overnight millionaires. Thus, any

prospect of serving the two masters and staying true to the roots of hip hop becomes very unlikely, as Jay Z's lyrics suggest:

> If skills sold, truth be told, I'd probably be
> lyrically, Talib Kweli
> Truthfully I wanna rhyme like Common Sense
> But I did five mill' - I ain't been rhymin like Common since
> When your cents got that much in common
> And you been hustlin since your inception
> Fuck perception go with what makes sense
> Since I know what I'm up against
> We as rappers must decide what's most important
> And I can't help the poor if I'm one of them.

Jay Z is considered to be one of the most famous artists in modern gangsta rap. He is publicly recognized in Forbes Poll as the richest rapper in the industry, earning millions, owning mansions, yachts, cars, nightclubs and his own music empire. In his song, however, he describes his own double consciousness and there is a conflict between the two. In the lyrics, he mentions two conscious rappers, Talib Kweli and Common Sense (known as Common), who, unlike Jay Z rap about the political and anti-capitalist content in their music. He uses the words "inception" and "perception" to argue about his career and the approaches he took in his rap life. Jay Z says that when there is too much political content in rap lyrics they are rejected by the music industry and the consumers of hip hop. Jay Z also raps that if he does take part in mainstream hip hop he is in a position to support those less fortunate than himself. Double consciousness for Jay Z is being black and, by becoming part of the white elite, being able to contribute to black charities such as Play Pumps International[21] and pledging 1 million dollars to the American relief for Hurricane Katrina.

[21] PlayPumps International US is a charity to deliver safe water solutions to communities in Africa.

Although Jay Z has played his part as the Good Samaritan, making money and then giving it back, there is a feeling, deeply unearthed in his song, that his desire to belong to the wealthy elite of America is far greater than his desire to become an educator for his black community, that his white consciousness is more developed than his black consciousness. The fact is that commercial rap is consumer rap, and the rappers themselves have become the largest consumers, with the purchase of fancy cars, large houses and all the "ice" they can buy. It is all but good reason for gangsta rappers to continue to go to any lengths possible to maintain their extravagant lifestyle, even if it is at the expense of their own race.

When Conscious rapper Nas raps, "Hip Hop is Dead", he is in fact providing the underlying truth of this phenomenal music genre: that hip hop has not only been consumed by white capitalists but, more disturbingly, that black gangsta rappers are equally much to blame for its demise. It could even be argued that they are even more at fault for intentionally exploiting their own history, culture, community and self-identity and destroying the originality of what hip hop represented, for commercial success and financial gain. Today, there are conscious rappers who provide some hope for the preservation of black consciousness, but they are distant from the mainstream popular culture. Representing the underground or alternative scene, the messages they voice are rarely heard by the masses, and therefore their contributions go unrecognized. The conscious rappers of the golden age of hip hop were on another plateau, creating lyrics that would inspire African Americans to unveil themselves in a white-dominated society and abolish the color-line, as Du Bois desperately yearned for. With little airplay not

only of conscious rap but of hip hop in general, the resurrection of hip hop seems unlikely, and with it the continuing dissemination of black consciousness.

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