

Dr. King's Struggle Then and Now: A Look into Black Musical Artists' Struggle for Economic and Social Justice

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Movement intellectuals in popular music are musical artists who educate an audience by sharing counter-narratives that reflect the concerns of a large mass of people. Since Dr. King's assassination, Black musical artists have taken up his critical-structural paradigmatic worldview through the vernacular of their music. As such, Dr. King and his legacy live on through the messages and actions of artists. In adopting critical race theory and rhetoric, we hope to shed light on how it is Black artists educate a larger audience on the concerns raised by Black Americans over the last 50 years. That is, we examine the lyrical content and career pursuits of Black artists that raise an awareness of systemic oppression and ultimately move toward action. We first draw our attention to artists at the time of Dr. King's rise and fall (Sam Cooke, the Staple Singers, and Curtis Mayfield). We then turn our attention to contemporary artists' pursuit of social and economic justice (Common, Lupe Fiasco, and Chance the Rapper). Throughout our analysis, we tie artists' lyrics and career moves back to Dr. King's final "I Have Been to the Mountaintop" speech.

Keywords: critical race theory, music, counter-narratives, vernacular, social movement

In January of 1966, Dr. King took civil disobedience to the streets of Chicago. However, upon his arrival, he was met with a different beast; Dr. King and his affiliates operated under the assumptions that brought them success in the south. In the north, and particularly in Chicago, King was met with a different White mentality and different concerns raised by racially marginalized groups.¹ Dr. King is quoted as saying, "I have never seen, even in Mississippi and Alabama, mobs as hateful as I've seen here in Chicago."² In addition to the overt hatred from Chicago Whites, King was confronted with the slums of Chicago's south side. In light of this, it was with his experiences in Chicago that Dr. King began to mobilize efforts toward changing poor living and working conditions for Black Americans. In the end, the reality of both social and economic unrest in Chicago ultimately moved Dr. King to revisit his own assumptions and approaches within the civil rights movement.

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¹ David Bernstein, "The Longest March," *Chicago Magazine*, July 15, 2016. <http://www.chicagomag.com/Chicago-Magazine/August-2016/Martin-Luther-King-Chicago-Freedom-Movement/>.

² Matt Pearce, "When Martin Luther King Jr. Took His Fight into the North, and Saw a New Level of Hatred," *LA Times*, January 18, 2016. <http://www.latimes.com/nation/la-na-mlk-chicago-20160118-story.html>

While his legacy is multifaceted, all too often, Dr. King's "I Have a Dream" speech has been taken up through a color-blind ideology.³ In judging people by the content of their character and not the color of their skin, many often overlook the systemic constraints that cause oppression in the first place. As a result, K-12 institutes of education tend to highlight color-blind ideology rather than systemic oppression.⁴ However, throughout his life, and especially at the time of his death, Dr. King worked to resist color-blind ideology through his focus on systemic oppression. Dr. King's legacy is so much more than his "I Have a Dream" speech. In other words, when taking up Dr. King's words, we must adorn skepticism to ensure it is not reproduced in the service of hegemonic worldviews. Consequently, students need to look beyond "I Have a Dream" to gain exposure to his critical-structuralist paradigmatic views on society.⁵ That is, how a critical-structuralist paradigmatic view seeks to uncover systemic inequalities as a means for change.

The night before his assassination on April 4th, 1968, Dr. King gave his prophetic "I Have Been to the Mountaintop" (hereinafter "Mountaintop") speech to a worker's conditions march in Memphis, Tennessee.⁶ In broad terms, this speech illustrates Dr. King's message of social and economic oppression in relation the mundane, economic performances of everyday life and these reflect historical structures of inequality. Since Dr. King's time, we purport that speaking directly to racial realities manifests in many ways outside of traditional rhetorical modes of public speeches (e.g. movies, radio, religious institutions, etc.). Music is one particular avenue through which audiences come to learn about social, political, and economic oppression.⁷ As such, this current paper seeks to uncover Dr. King's critical-structuralist legacy through musical artists' lyrics and career development. As public memory scholars would remind us, there is a constant dialogue between the past and the present.⁸ Through this framing, we echo sentiments that a historical perspective on contemporary discourses is useful if not necessary as history is itself persuasive.⁹ As explored in this criticism, James Baldwin and Cornel West emphasize that the historical and contemporary invisibility of the Black experience positions Black musical artists in a way that lends authentic, yet critical critique of a White, capitalist American society.¹⁰

This current analysis seeks to uncover Dr. King's critical-structuralist legacy through musical artists' music and career development. We first begin with a review of literature on critical race theory, rhetoric, and music in communication. Our analysis then returns to focus on Black musicians that spread Dr. King's message of social and economic inequity through their lyrical content. More specifically, we first focus on artists at the time of Dr. King's rise and fall (Sam Cooke, the

³ Keith C. Barton, "Primary Sources in History: Breaking Through the Myths." *Phi Delta Kappan* 86 (2005): 749-750. doi: 10.1177/00317217058601006

⁴ Derrick P. Alridge, "The Limits of Master Narratives in History Textbooks: An Analysis of Representations of Martin Luther King, Jr.," *Teachers College Record* 108 (2006): 662. doi: 10.1111/j.1467-9620.2006.00664.x

⁵ Martin, Judith N., and Thomas K. Nakayama, "Thinking dialectically about culture and communication," *Communication Theory* 9 (1999): 9. doi: 10.1111/j.1468-2885.1999.tb00160.x

⁶ Martin Luther King, Jr., "I've Been to the Mountaintop," *American Rhetoric Top 100 Speeches*, February 7, 2017. <http://www.americanrhetoric.com/speeches/mlkivebeentothemountaintop.htm>

⁷ Antwi A. Akom, "Critical Hip Hop Pedagogy as a Form of Liberatory Praxis," *Equity & Excellence in Education* 42 (2009): 53. doi: 10.1080/10665680802612519

⁸ Tamar Katriel, "'Our Future is Where Our Past Is': Studying Heritage Museums as Ideological and Performative Arenas," *Communication Monographs*, 60 (1993): 69-75. doi: 10.1080/03637759309376296

⁹ Michael Tumolo, "On Useful Rhetorical History," *Journal of Contemporary Rhetoric* 1 (2011): 58. http://contemporaryrhetoric.com/wp-content/uploads/2017/01/tumolo1_6.pdf

¹⁰ James Baldwin, *Notes of a Native Son* (Beacon Press: Boston, 1955/2012), 25; Cornel West, *Hope on a Tightrope* (Carlsbad, CA: Hay House, 2008), 111-2.

Staple Singers, and Curtis Mayfield). We then shift our attention to contemporary artists' pursuit of social and economic justice (Common, Lupe Fiasco, and Chance the Rapper). Throughout our analysis, we tie artists' lyrics and career moves back to Dr. King's final "Mountaintop" speech—a speech that resonates with Black musical artists' message years later. We conclude our analysis with implications of music as a means to educate an audience.

Before heading into the literature review, we believe the need to address our identities within the rhetorical situation of calling out the whiteness of rhetoric. Both Rob and Kat are White educated doctoral students. Rob grew up in a suburb east of Cleveland, Ohio and Kat grew up in rural Arkansas outside of Little Rock. We approached this project within the paradox of being a particular type of anti-racists—those who seek to disrupt and deconstruct the hegemonic norms of whiteness while also benefiting from racist structures in place.¹¹ Writing this paper opened the space for us to continue thinking about the role our whiteness plays within our scholarship. We observe and listen to the criticism of whiteness by critical race scholars and Black artists as a means to learn about injustice. We value music as a powerful force given its ability to be a heuristic and pedagogical tool. Our whiteness is not absent from the rest of the paper but woven throughout through our arguments, judgements, and assumptions. More importantly, we remind readers of the whiteness of rhetorical criticism itself. As Lisa Flores¹² notes, the study of race is rhetorical and rhetoric itself is racialized. Through our paradoxical positionality of reproducing the historical whiteness of rhetorical criticism, we seek to unpack the vitally important vernacular work of Black musical artists and how they (un)intentionally teach us about ourselves and the privilege we maintain.

Rhetorics of Race and Music: “Around My Way [Freedom Ain’t Free]”

Rhetorical discourse continues to grow as claims are made about the persuasive nature of political discourse, legal proceedings, organizational messages, and everyday vernaculars. One area of growing interest is the relationship between rhetoric and critical race theory (CRT). Since it has been argued that rhetoric is the underlying logics of CRT,¹³ communication scholars have specifically made moves to expand CRT beyond the scope of legal discourse analysis, and critique.¹⁴ More specifically, when critical race theorists center persuasion within their work, one becomes attuned to the “rhetorical paradigm of naming, instituting, and enforcing reality.”¹⁵ Following Audrey Olmsted, we advance that since speech acts are often themselves rhetorical, language, in all its forms, is needed to critique and reshape reality. In our case, such rhetorics become tethered to the spoken realities of Black bodies as told through the words of Dr. King and subsequent musical artists of color.

¹¹ George Yancy, *Look! A White: Philosophical Essays on Whiteness* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2016),

¹² Lisa Flores, “Between Abundance and Marginalization: The Imperative of Racial Rhetorical Criticism,” *Review of Communication* 16 (2016), 4-24. doi: 10.1080/15358593.2016.1183871

¹³ Audrey P. Olmsted, “Words are Acts: Critical Race Theory as a Rhetorical Construct,” *The Howard Journal of Communications* 9 (1998): 323-31. doi: 10.1080/106461798246934

¹⁴ For example, Marouf Hasian, Jr. and Fernando Delgado, “The Trials and Tribulations of Racialized Critical Rhetorical Theory: Understanding the Rhetorical Ambiguities of Proposition 187,” *Communication Theory* 8 (1998): 245-270, doi: 10.1111/j.1468-2885.1998.tb00221.x; Jonathan P. Rossing, “Critical Intersections and Comic Possibilities: Extending Racialized Critical Rhetorical Scholarship,” *Communication Law Review* 10 (2010): 10-27. <http://hdl.handle.net/1805/7221>

¹⁵ Olmsted, 330.

Historically speaking, CRT draws from a line of work on rhetoric, race, and legal discourse.¹⁶ Often supported, if not beginning from the lived experiences of African-Americans,¹⁷ CRT aims to transform the relationship between power, race, and racism.¹⁸ Building off the work of CRT founding thinkers, like Derrick Bell, CRT has been taken up outside of legal studies into education, sociology, women's studies, American studies, political science, and communication studies. Rhetorical scholars in the latter group have continued the traditional approach to CRT within legal discourse, while working to account for similar logics in other genres of discourse. Advancing for a racialized critical rhetorical theory, Marouf Hasian, Jr. and Fernando Delgado do both. By acknowledging the strengths and weaknesses of CRT and critical rhetoric, they present a new theoretical framework to "move beyond simple and reductive ways of essentializing race and race relations."¹⁹ For us, their critical intervention is their call for rhetorical scholars to amplify vernacular rhetorics²⁰ to expose the opening and existence of alternative public spaces and realities.²¹

Drawing attention to the vernacular acknowledges how the marginalized and oppressed are engaged in the creation of rhetoric—which expands the number of social actors and pushes critics to fully account for the process of knowledge production in relation to race and racism. Racialized critical rhetorical theorizing "goes beyond the CRT attempt to uncritically invert racial binaries or empower different groups. Instead, this more nuanced theoretical approach looks at the ways that 'the law' is interpreted, applied, and understood by the ordinary citizens who find themselves configured as 'the Other.'"²² Although Hasian and Delgado do important work in their essay, they still are rather limited in their continued emphasis on legal discourse as the primary text of analysis. We purport that ignoring how similar logics of race, racism, hegemony, and ideology in legal discourse function in other communicative avenues runs the risk of writing off vital spaces in which the vernacular is critiquing (and upholding) dominant racial culture and White supremacy.

We are far from the first to advance a shift of CRT (and its rhetorical assumptions) to discourse outside of legal cases and precedents. Carrying the call for attending to the vernacular must acknowledge all the other avenues through which vernaculars are positioned and co-construct rhetorical realities specific to race, racism, and power. Vernacular discourses specific to race and racism speak to more than legal debates—they are actively engaged in a number of dialogues in which racialized discourses are negotiated, transformed, and undermined within our everyday lives.²³ Therefore, our paper embraces the intertwined and mutually influencing relationship between CRT and rhetoric. More specifically, our analysis assumes that both critical tools "share a concern from the ways communication informs attitudes and ideologies, orchestrates civic action, and consequently, impacts racialized realities."²⁴ Moreover, a focus on the vernacular, or the discourse of the everyday, permits us to highlight how African-Americans resist essentialist notions of race in order to illuminate new possibilities for attitudes and racial realities. This approach to

¹⁶ Richard Delgado and Jean Stefancic, *Critical Race Theory: An Introduction* (2nd ed.) (New York: New York University Press, 2012), 5.

¹⁷ Rachel Alicia Griffin, "Critical Race Theory as means to Deconstruct, Recover and Evolve in Communication Studies," *Communication Law Review* 10 (2010): 2. http://commlawreview.org/Archives/CLRV10i1/PDFs/Critical_Race_Theory_as_a_Means_to_Deconstruct_Recover_and_Evolve_in_Communication_Studies.pdf

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 3.

¹⁹ Hasian, Jr., and Delgado, 246.

²⁰ Kent Ono and John Sloop, "The Critique of Vernacular Discourse," *Communication Monographs* 62 (1995): 20-1, 26. doi: 10.1080/03637759509376346

²¹ *Ibid.*, 262.

²² Hasian, Jr., and Delgado, 261.

²³ Rossing, 13.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 11.

studying race and rhetoric acknowledges the numerous outlets vernacular ideologies utilize to circulate their voices within the public—which includes Dr. Martin Luther King and Black musical artists.

Dr. Martin Luther King's messages have historically been of great interest to rhetorical scholars.²⁵ Broadly speaking, King's power to construct meaningful connections between himself and his audience is what clearly continues to draw rhetorical scholars across the decades to his words and messages. Although rhetorical scholars particularly attuned to the logics of CRT have cautioned against King's words being taken up as a warrant for a post-racial ideology,²⁶ we are most interested in how his messages specific to a material turn have been taken up by similar vernacular bodies across the decades. Here, we advance for an increased rhetorical inquiry into music as a particularly powerful form of persuasive discourse that speaks to a rhetor (the artist), their message, and the audience. In other words, one significant way to account for the continued relevance of King's messages is how they are traced through the narratives and lyrics of Black musical artists in the U.S.

Music as a form of communication has been established by communication scholars and more specifically by rhetoricians as a form of rhetorical exchange.²⁷ Just as other "normative" or "traditional" modes of rhetoric are disseminated, similar logics are at play within lyrics. Rhetorical scholars have documented the significance of music in relation to social change²⁸ and as response to particular rhetorical situations.²⁹ Music, particularly the lyrics, is rhetorical given its ability to cultivate meaning between the artist and the listener. There are clear functions of identification, employment of symbols, and transformation and/or reaffirmation of reality. Ultimately, there is more to rhetoric than persuasion; rhetoric also deals with powers of consciousness.³⁰ In the same manner traditional speeches evoke meaning within a particular period and how those words can

²⁵ Michael Leff and Ebony Utley, "Instrumental and constitutive rhetoric in Martin Luther King Jr.'s 'Letter from Birmingham Jail,'" *Rhetoric & Public Affairs* 7 (2004): 37-51. doi: 10.1353/rap.2204.0026; Davi Johnson, "Martin Luther King Jr.'s 1963 Birmingham Campaign as Image Event," *Rhetoric & Public Affairs* 10 (2007): 1-25. doi: 10.1353/rap.2007.0023; Gary S. Selby, "Framing Social Protest: The Exodus Narrative in Martin Luther King's Montgomery Bus Boycott Rhetoric," *Journal of Communication & Religion* 24 (2001): 68-93. <http://web.a.ebsco-host.com>; Christopher Lynch, "Reaffirmation of God's Anointed Prophet: The Use of Chiasm in Martin Luther King's 'Mountaintop' Speech," *Howard Journal of Communications* 6 (1995): 12-31. doi: 10.1080/10646179509361682; Jansen Werner, "Building a 'Dwelling Place' for Justice: Ethos Reinvention in Martin Luther King Jr.'s 'Where Do We Go from Here?'" *Rhetoric & Public Affairs* 20 (2017): 109-312. Retrieved from <https://muse.jhu.edu/article/668538/summary>

²⁶ Kristen Hoerl, "Selective Amnesia and Racial Transcendence in News Coverage of President Obama's Inauguration," *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 98 (2012): 178-202. doi: 10.1080/00335630.2012.663499

²⁷ Sellnow and Sellnow, 395; Irvine and Kirkpatrick, 272.

²⁸ For example, Eric King Watts, "An Exploration of Spectacular Consumption: Gangsta Rap as Cultural Commodity," *Communication Theory* 48 (1997): 42-58. doi: 10.1080/10510979709368490

²⁹ For example, Janice L. Rushing, "Gospel Music Rhetoric," *Religious Communication Today* 1 (1978): 29-35. <http://web.a.ebscohost.com.ezproxy1.lib.asu.edu/ehost/pdfviewer/pdfviewer?vid=5&sid=cb12d7af-12d1-406f-8f2e-4bdc2a65b8db%40sessionmgr4010>

³⁰ Maurice Charland, "Being-Jazz in the Middle," *Canadian Journal of Communication* 41 (2016): 443. doi: 10.22230/cjc.2016v41n3a3173

be taken up within a different context, lyrics in songs function in a similar fashion.³¹ In other words, just as political and everyday speech is rhetorically influenced, so are lyrics.³²

Therefore, when we take a rhetorical approach to lyrics we first privilege the utility and power of words in constructing counter-arguments, realities, and social possibilities; and how this medium re-centers the displaced body of a person of color so that their lived realities can become public. Both of these assumptions acknowledge “[r]hetoric’s fundamental concern [on] how worlds are brought into being.”³³ In this case, the world building of Black identities, realities, and their various approaches to cultural critique. As James Baldwin succinctly articulates, “It is only in his [sic] music...that the Negro in America has been able to tell his [sic] story.”³⁴ Baldwin continues, “The story of the Negro in America is the story of America—or, more precisely, it is the story of America itself.”³⁵ Just as the oratory of Dr. King has been hailed as a telling of Black experiences and larger cultural trends in the U.S., lyrics within music rhetorically operate in the same manner. Consequently, what we are proposing in the following pages is not novel or theoretically new. Rhetorical scholars have already been accounting for the legacy of Dr. King to music and the civil rights era³⁶ and the significance of rap music.³⁷ Instead, we aim to honor the life of Dr. King while remaining skeptical about how his messages have been taken up in contemporary American, racial culture, politics, and identity. In light of this, our rhetorical texts under consideration are King’s “Mountaintop” speech and the lyrics of Black artists—with the latter coming to the forefront. In other words, our primary texts are the lyrics of Black artists from across the decades and how they speak to themes derived from Dr. King’s “Mountaintop” speech.

The Soul of the Great Migration: “People Get Ready”

1916 marked the beginning of the great migration. For the next 50 years, African-Americans moved in masses from the rural south to cities in the West, Midwest, and Northeast. Cities such as Cleveland, Chicago, Detroit, and New York became destinations for African-Americans looking for new jobs with the hopes of creating a better way of living. However, upon arrival, African-Americans were met with White hostility that manifested in both blatant and subtle ways. For example, Whites sought to maintain power and control through segregating African-American communities. Once segregated, small wages and poor living conditions created Black ghettos. In addition to the search for a new life, African-Americans brought with them all their cultural capital to northern cities. Among such cultural capital was music. Gospel, jazz, soul, and blues emerged from African-American communities. Chicago blossomed as one of the cultural centers for African-American music in the north and Midwest.

³¹ Troy A. Murphy, “Rhetorical Invention and the Transformation of ‘We Shall Overcome,’” *Qualitative Research Reports in Communication* 4 (2003): 2. Retrieved from <http://web.a.ebscohost.com.ezproxy1.lib.asu.edu/ehost/detail/detail?vid=18&sid=cb12d7af-12d1-406f-8f2e-4bdc2a65b8db%40sessionmgr4010&bdata=JnNpdGU9ZWwhvc3QtG1ZlZQ%3d%3d#AN=11926578&db=ufh>

³² Here we are clearly ranking the lyrical (the verbal and spoken) above other rhetorical variables within music.

³³ Charland, 444.

³⁴ Baldwin, 25.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 25.

³⁶ Murphy, 1

³⁷ Richard T. Craig, “‘I Know What Them Girls Like’: A Rhetorical Analysis of Thug Appeal in Rap Lyrics,” *Journal of Communication Inquiry* 40 (2015): 26. doi: 10.1177/0196859915585170

The Jim Crow laws of the south manifested in the segregated northern cities Chicago. White realtors made sure cities remained segregated between Black and White communities. Chicago was no different:

Ghettos became the most visible legacy of the Great Migration. In the 1920s, White real-estate agents introduced restrictive covenants, which made it illegal for homeowners in all-White neighborhoods to sell or rent to Blacks. Black families began to cluster in a part of the Near South Side that came to be called the Black Belt, later nicknamed Bronzeville.³⁸

African-American communities found refuge from economic constraints through religion and music.³⁹ Black churches served as the musical epicenter for rising Black artists.⁴⁰ More specifically, Black churches served as the means through which music and faith emerged as the fuel of perseverance.

The genres of gospel and blues are similar sounds with similar meanings. Gospel artists sing about salvation in a religious sense. Conversely, blues artists sing about daily longings and concerns such as romantic love and poverty. However, both are connected through hope.⁴¹ Gospel artists hope for redemption in an afterlife whereas blues artists maintain hope for a better living condition or for a lost love. Across the country, gospel artists and blues artists emerged as cultural commentators of contemporary issues. Gospel quartets such as the Soul Stirrers, Blind Boys of Alabama, and the Impressions emerged as site for economic gain for Black musical artists in the church.⁴² Led by Muddy Waters, blues artists emerged in Chicago, whose songs reflected the social ostracization of Jim Crow laws. For example, in his song, "Mannish Boy," Waters' sings in double entendre to assert himself as a man—both in retaliation of Black male emasculation and being called, "boy." It is through this combination of gospel and blues that Chicago artists emerge as movement intellectuals in popular music.

For our purposes, movement intellectuals in popular music are defined as, "an artist who observes, collects and disseminates warranted counter-narratives through the medium of their music."⁴³ Whether through a sacred message or secular message, artists begin to share counter-narratives of White supremacy as it manifests in their daily lives. The rise of Black artists in Chicago mirrored the rise of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. as a political activist. Mutual inspiration permeated the boundaries of secular and sacred music for Dr. King. Artists such as Mahalia Jackson provided a religious grounding for Dr. King. Similarly, artists such as the Staple Singers provided political commentary on contemporary social and political issues. For example, Dr. King's favorite song of the Staple Singers was, "Why am I Treated So Bad," a song that commented on the integration of the Little Rock Nine in 1954.⁴⁴ As such, our criticism attempts to excavate these movement intellectuals in popular music who carry on Dr. King's message through their music.

King's Message Reflected in Music

³⁸ Bernstein, para. 13.

³⁹ West, 111-2.

⁴⁰ Greg Kot, *I'll Take You There: Mavis Staples, the Staple Singers, and the March Up Freedom's Highway* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2014), 41.

⁴¹ West, 116-7.

⁴² Peter Guralnick, *Dream Boogie: The Triumph of Sam Cooke* (New York: Back Bay Books, 2015), 35.

⁴³ Robert Razzante, "Movement Intellectuals in Popular Music: An Alternative Means of Public Education." *Media Literacy in Higher Education Environments*, ed. Jayne Cabbage (Hershey, PA: IGI Global, 2018), 286.

⁴⁴ Kot, 108.

What follows is a delineation of musical artists who, over time, used their musical platform to share the same vision of Dr. King. More specifically, we attempt to explore how artists tapped into hope as a means for better living conditions. We demarcate our analysis in two eras of music. We begin by exploring artists who performed prior to and after Dr. King's assassination 50 years ago. We then move into contemporary artists who continue to share the same vision of Dr. King today. Along the way we demonstrate how artists use their platform as a means to critique color-blind ideology through their critical-structuralist counter-narratives. Through our criticism, we hope to articulate the critical-structuralist legacy of Dr. King as he left us as a sustained focus on systemic inequity. To delineate our selection of artists, we primarily focus our attention to Chicago-based artists who narrate such legacy. Chicago artists narrate the worldview through a vernacular rhetoric that exemplifies the poor working and living conditions faced by Dr. King and African-Americans at the time of his visit in 1966.

“A Change is Gonna Come”

*The nation is sick. Trouble is in the land; confusion all around. That's a strange statement. But I know, somehow, that only when it is dark enough can you see the stars. And I see God working in this period of the twentieth century in a way that men [sic], in some strange way, are responding.*⁴⁵

We begin by examining the musical mirroring of Dr. King's rise to prominence as a political activist. Sam Cooke, born nearly two years after Dr. King, rose as one of Chicago's most beloved personalities. Early in his career, Cooke sang with gospel quartets, the Highway QC's and the Soul Stirrers, before he turned to a more secular message as a solo artist. Although he switched to secular music, Sam's solo career remained politically neutral. However, immediately prior to his untimely death in 1964, Sam Cooke took a critical turn with his posthumous song, “A Change is Gonna Come.”⁴⁶ In the song, Cooke narrates his experiences of prejudice in the face of White supremacy: “Then I go to my brother, And I say brother help me please/But he winds up knockin' me, Back down on my knees.” Prior to this song, Sam would frequently perform for a White audience. With his hair conked back, and his savvy imitations of Frank Sinatra and Bing Crosby, Sam Cooke remained trapped in the White-driven market. However, right before he was murdered, Cooke started crossing paths with Malcom X, Muhammad Ali, and Jim Brown—all social activists within the Black community. Cooke's turn from a secular sound to a critical-secular sound started to become “dangerous” within the eyes of a White-driven market.

Growing up down the street from Sam were the Staples. The Staples family was reared by the patriarch, Roebuck “Pops” Staples who migrated from Mississippi in 1935. A lover of music and the church, Pops Staples decided to train his children to sing gospel music. The soulful sound from lead vocalist, Mavis Staples, gained attraction from many, including Dr. King. After meeting Dr. King, Pops Staples told his children, “If Dr. King can preach it, we can sing it.”⁴⁷ For example, the song “Freedom Highway” (1965) narrates Dr. King's March in Selma: “There is just one thing, I can't understand my friend/Why some folk think freedom, Was not designed for all men/Yes I

⁴⁵ King, “I Have Been to the Mountaintop.”

⁴⁶ Guralnick, 540.

⁴⁷ Kot, 91.

think I voted for the right man, Said we would overcome.” The Staple Singers had a similar background as Sam. However, the Staples lived long enough to see the future direction of Dr. King’s efforts.

After Dr. King’s assassination, The Staple Singers released a series of politically active songs including, “When Will We Be Paid?” (1969). In the song, the Staple Singers take a critical-structuralist turn:

We have worked this country from shore to shore
 Our women cooked all your food and washed all your clothes
 We picked all your cotton and laid the railroad steel
 Worked our hands to the bone at your lumber mill
 When will we be paid for the work we've done?

Both Cooke and the Staple Singers answer Dr. King’s call to action. They are the (musical) stars of the 20th century that mobilize their efforts to create change through music. As we see throughout the 70s and beyond, Black artists continue Dr. King’s legacy by locating systemic oppression in their lyrical content.

Meanwhile, Curtis Mayfield grew up an admirer of Sam Cooke and the Soul Stirrers. When he was 14, Mayfield teamed up with Jerry Butler to form the Impressions, a group who had a gospel-infused soul sound. Mayfield penned the civil disobedient protest song, “People Get Ready” in 1965. Yet, at the turn of the decade and into the 70s, Mayfield’s sound changed. Embracing Black pride, Curtis released a series of socially active albums including, *Roots* (1971), *Superfly* (1973), *Got to Find a Way* (1974), and *There’s No Place Like America Today* (1975). Curtis took a critical-structuralist turn after King’s death when he commented on economic depression, the Vietnam War, and hostile social living conditions.⁴⁸ In addition to serving as a movement intellectual in popular music, Curtis pursued the economic empowerment of other Black artists. Under his label, Curtom Records, Curtis enjoyed success with other Black artists such as the Staple Singers, Aretha Franklin, Gladys Knight and the Pips, and Donny Hathaway.

In addition to his musical content, Curtis Mayfield’s record label, Curtom, and Sam Cooke’s label SAR, sought to create economic empowerment for Black artists. In his “Mountaintop” speech, Dr. King advised Black Americans to seek economic empowerment through their banking practices,

... we've got to strengthen Black institutions. I call upon you to take your money out of the banks downtown and deposit your money in Tri-State Bank. We want a ‘bank-in’ movement in Memphis...Now these are some practical things that we can do. We begin the process of building a greater economic base. And at the same time, we are putting pressure where it really hurts. I ask you to follow through here.⁴⁹

In seeking economic empowerment for Black artists, Cooke and Mayfield pursue a practical strategy to keep money in the wallets of Black musicians rather than White record label capitalists. Sam Cooke, the Staple Singers, and Curtis Mayfield serve as the foundation from which contemporary artists emerge in Chicago.

⁴⁸ Todd Mayfield, *Traveling Soul: The Life of Curtis Mayfield* (Chicago: Chicago Review Press, 2017), 125.

⁴⁹ King, “I Have Been to the Mountaintop.”

“One Day It’ll All Make Sense”

While the Staple Singers and Curtis Mayfield found success in Chicago, a new sound was rising out of the Bronx on the east coast. Hip-hop culture has four primary pillars: DJing, b-boying, graffiti, and MCing (rap).⁵⁰ Rap served as a means for a new generation of artists to capitalize on the success of previous rhythm and blues artists. DJs such as Grandmaster Flash and DJ Cool Herc sampled the hits of previous artists to create a new beat for rap music. Chicago native, Jesse Saunders, embraced hip-hop in Chicago and created some of the first house music hits in the mid-to-late 80s. However, socially aware music that explicitly embraced Dr. King’s vision failed to appear until the emergence of Common Sense.

Common (formerly known as Common Sense) pursued social activism through his music, acting, writing, etc. Moreover, Common’s lyrical content oftentimes features a need for understanding. For example, in “My City,” Common sings about the informal education he learned by observing his living conditions:

The amounts of Black and Brown they lock up
But the Most High encourages me to put the Glock up
And Stock up on do for self-knowledge
A brother couldn't afford to go to college
So I had to learn from the school of hard knock
On the hard blocks of the Chi

Common’s message resonates with the living conditions Dr. King witnessed during his visit in 1966. As a movement intellectual in popular music, Common actively pursues social critique in his music. More specifically, he answers Dr. King’s call to focus on Black Americans living in poor living conditions. In this “Mountaintop” speech, Dr. King states,

It's all right to talk about "long white robes over yonder," in all of its symbolism. But ultimately people want some suits and dresses and shoes to wear down here! It's all right to talk about 'streets flowing with milk and honey,' but God has commanded us to be concerned about the slums down here, and his children who can't eat three square meals a day.⁵¹

Common does not sing about the fame and success of being an established rapper. Rather, through his vernacular positionality, he sings about the informal “public” education he received from the slums of Chicago. While Common succeeded, other artists that followed seemed to struggle in maintaining such balance in an ever-increasing neoliberal society.

Kanye West has always had an interest in staying relevant in popular culture. Moreover, Kanye has fallen ill to the capitalist haze of rugged individualism.⁵² In addition to making music, Kanye pursues his own fashion line, various businesses opportunities, and even politicking with president Trump. Additionally, as of 2016, Kanye demonstrated plans to run for president in 2020 and 2024 due to the result of the most recent presidential election.⁵³ Meanwhile, in addition to all of Kanye’s

⁵⁰ Priva Parmar, *Knowledge Reigns Supreme: The Critical Pedagogy of Hip-Hop Artist KRS-ONE* (Rotterdam, The Netherlands: Sense Pub, 2009), 29.

⁵¹ King, “I’ve Been to the Mountaintop.”

⁵² Spencer Kornhaber, “Kanye West’s Prosperity Gospel.” *The Atlantic*, September 18, 2012, <https://www.theatlantic.com/entertainment/archive/2012/09/kanye-wests-prosperity-gospel/262502/>

⁵³ Meghan Giannotta, “Celebrities Who May Run for President in 2020: Kanye West, Katy Perry, More.” *Am New York*, May 22, 2017, <https://www.amny.com/entertainment/celebrities/>

economic pursuits, his music has shifted from socially aware music (see his albums *The College Dropout*, *Late Registration*, and *Graduation*) to sounds that promote his own branding. In contemporary U.S. music, Kanye seems to be taking the spotlight from socially aware artists such as Common. As such, it may be easy to lose sight of Dr. King's message in a neoliberal 21st century. However, hope seems to remain alive through the music of Kanye's contemporaries.

The early to mid 2000s saw the rise of a new rapper from Chicago, Wasalu Muhammad Jaco, also known as Lupe Fiasco. Lupe's early success was attributed to his lyrical content that critiqued power dynamics in the U.S. after 9/11. Songs such as "American Terrorist" 1, 2, and 3 (2006, 2011, 2012), "Hurt Me Soul" (2006), "Words I Never Said" (2011), and "Hood Now" (2012) all served as calls for listeners to pay attention to the systemic forces that control contemporary living. For example, in "Words I Never Said," Lupe identifies contemporary manifestations of systemic oppression:

Your child's future was the first to go with budget cuts
 If you think that hurts, then wait, here comes the uppercut
 The school was garbage in the first place, that's on the up and up
 Keep you at the bottom but tease you with the upper crust
 You get it, then they move it, so you never keeping up enough

Rather than strictly identifying problems in society, he urges listeners to use the means of their agency to create change: "Just listening to Pac ain't gon' make it stop, A rebel in your thoughts ain't gon' make it halt, If you don't become an actor, you'll never be a factor." "Words I Never Said" is demonstrative of Dr. King's vision for social, economic, and political change. Lupe, like Dr. King, calls for action when it comes to unjust treatment of Black Americans.

Lupe's commercial success has ebbed and flowed. Part of the reason being is that audiences search for a different message. Another part is that his lyrical content often gets censored by record labels who only want a pop-chart single.⁵⁴ Such obstacles have caused much frustration for Lupe over the years. However, it is from his experience of marginalization that he educates his audience about resisting injustice. Lupe's call is similar to that of Dr. King's when he says,

And so, as a result of this, we are asking you tonight, to go out and tell your neighbors not to buy Coca-Cola in Memphis. Go by and tell them not to buy Sealtest milk. Tell them not to buy—what is the other bread? —Wonder Bread. Tell them not to buy Hart's bread. As Jesse Jackson has said, up to now, only the garbage men have been feeling pain; now we must kind of redistribute the pain. We are choosing these companies because they haven't been fair in their hiring policies; and we are choosing them because they can begin the process of saying they are going to support the needs and the rights of these men [sic] who are on strike.⁵⁵

In recognizing the power at play, Lupe calls for a change in action similar to Dr. King's. Dr. King advocated for a change in spending habits that reinforced social injustice through economic spending. Lupe fails to offer a specific plan of action for his listeners. However, he does encourage his audience to actively seek out injustices in society. One particular injustice Lupe experienced per-

celebrities-who-may-run-for-president-in-2020-kanye-west-katy-perry-more-1.12943170

⁵⁴ Adam Fleischer, "Lupe is in Another Battle with Atlantic Records," *MTV News*, October 14, 2014, <http://www.mtv.com/news/1962864/lupe-fiasco-is-in-another-battle-with-atlantic-records/>

⁵⁵ King, "I've Been to the Mountaintop."

sonally manifested through big record labels' restrictions on Black artists' pursuits to make socially aware music. While he actively struggled with injustice himself, younger artists pay close attention and learn.

Chancellor Bennett, known as Chance the Rapper, represents one particular artist who observed Lupe's struggle. In addition to observation and sustained vernacular critique, Chance acts. In late 2016, Kanye offered Bennett a chance to join his record label, GOOD Music. However, Chance denied the offer to pursue the freedom of not having to restrict his musical ambitions to the expectations of a record label.⁵⁶ Rather than the strict pursuit of capitalist gain like Kanye, Chance answers Lupe's call for critical-structuralist action. In his resistance to sign with a record label, Chance takes a professional risk. However, this is a professional risk echoed by Dr. King,

That's the question before you tonight. Not, "If I stop to help the sanitation workers, what will happen to my job. Not, "If I stop to help the sanitation workers what will happen to all of the hours that I usually spend in my office every day and every week as a pastor?" The question is not, "If I stop to help this man [sic] in need, what will happen to me?" The question is, "If I do not stop to help the sanitation workers, what will happen to them?" That's the question.

Chance could have, and very well might have, considered the personal/professional risks of not signing with a record label. However, he also understands the economic injustice big record labels procure through their business practices. As such, Chance took the risk in hopes that future artists might become free from economic constraints too.

King's Rhetoric and Music: "Move on Up"

As rhetoricians themselves, music intellectual in popular music have an audience to which they sing. As time has gone on, artists shaped their music to reflect the experiences of their audiences. In a way, movement intellectuals in popular music become what Edwin Black calls, mimetic-orators. A mimetic-orator is one who, "is not to shape an audience's beliefs and disbeliefs but to reflect them."⁵⁷ As such, with a closer look into the lyrical content of Black artists' lyrical content of the past and present, one can come to understand Black American's cry for a socially and economically just society. Currently we seek the emergence of millennials as contemporary artists who reflect the cry of Black Americans through their musical pursuits.

Chance the Rapper represents Dr. King's vision as manifested in millennials and Gen Z'ers in 2018. That is, Lupe and Chance recognize how systematic, economic and social oppression operate through the record label industry. While fans admired Chance's, *Coloring Book*, what remains unclear is the future of his music. If Dr. King's legacy were to live on through Chance and other contemporary artists, their music might need to become more explicit in their critique of systemic oppression such as Sam Cooke, the Staple Singers, and Curtis Mayfield of the past. However, as show in the past with Lupe, the more critical artists turn, the less airtime they get on the radio. As such, contemporary artists that carry on Dr. King's message need to find creative ways to continue weaving their systemic critiques in their music. We now turn to Cornel West to help us make suggestions for contemporary artists' future career pursuits.

Cornel West, echoing James Baldwin, articulates the importance of popular music for African-American artists throughout the history of the United States. More specifically, he notes that "these

⁵⁶ Peter A. Berry, "Chance the Rapper Says it Wasn't Easy Turning Down Kanye West's Signing Offer," *XXL*, December 22, 2016, <http://www.xxlmag.com/news/2016/12/chance-the-rapper-wasnt-easy-turning-down-kanye-offer/>

⁵⁷ Edwin Black, *Rhetorical Criticism* (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1978), 167.

artists respond to their sense of being rejected by society at large, of being invisible in society at large, with a subversive critique of that society.”⁵⁸ A contemporary analysis of this quote suggests that Black artists are both invisible and highly visible. Artists such as Chance the Rapper now become highly visible to both audiences of all races. West advocates that music allows us to get in touch with the humanity of others through music even when larger structural constraints manifest in society. As seen with artists like Kanye West, some Black artists are working a White, capitalist society to perfection as a means for self-promotion and continued economic gain. Others, like Lupe Fiasco, continue to struggle against the White, capitalist record industry. With Chance, there becomes hope for an alternative for those who sing from the limelight of popular music. In rejecting the external influences of a record label, Chance has the opportunity to create lyrical content of his choice, free from constraint of a record label. As demonstrated by these three artists, there are different ways to pursue musical careers—each with their own consequences.

“To bloom in spring, young people must read history closely. They must prepare themselves spiritually for struggle. They must become self-critical and be open to counsel from older freedom fighter.”⁵⁹ In his song “911,” Cornel West advocates that we return to the wisdom freedom fighters like Emmett Till’s mother, Mamie Till. This is especially true at a time in our nation where neoliberal White supremacists gain empowerment from leaders like President Donald Trump. In the song, West sings:

To be nigger in America is to be unsafe, unprotected, subject to random violence and hate
 Since 9/11, the whole nation has been nigger-ized
 A blues nation must now learn from a blues people
 How to deal with such conditions
 And return to the spiritual and moral wisdom of Emmett Till’s mother...
 She stepped to the lectern and said to the world
 I don’t have a minute to hate, I’ll pursue justice for the rest of my life
 But wisdom, listen, listen America, listen to your blues people, listen to Emmett Till’s mother.

Born in Mississippi in 1921 and raised in Chicago, Illinois, Mamie Till became a freedom fighter after her son was murdered by White supremacists in Money, Mississippi. After her son’s death, Mamie created the program called, The Emmett Till Players. The after-school program served as an opportunity for students in Chicago public schools to practice and rehearse famous Dr. King speeches. Such a move speaks directly to the goals of a sustained critical-structuralist praxis. Rather than solely rehearsing speeches from Dr. King, the work of Mamie Till, paired with movement intellectuals in popular music, continue King’s legacy through the educational pursuit of their activism and music. Yet, this work cannot be done.

Media literacy is one avenue through which students can learn outside the confines of formal education.⁶⁰ As previously noted, certain institutions of formal K-12 education continues to perpetuate color-blind ideology through the limited focus on Dr. King’s “I Have a Dream” speech.⁶¹ On a broader scale, scholars using critical race theory within public education continue to admonish how educational policies seek to uphold and maintain White supremacy within our public, K-

⁵⁸ West, 123.

⁵⁹ Ibid, 96.

⁶⁰ Jayne Cabbage, *Media Literacy in Higher Education Environments* (Hershey, PA: IGI Global, 2018).

⁶¹ Derrick P. Alridge, “The Limits of Master Narratives in History Textbooks: An Analysis of Representations of Martin Luther King, Jr.,” *Teachers College Record* 108 (2006): 662. doi: 10.1111/j.1467-9620.2006.00664.x

12 classrooms.⁶² As neoliberal logics continue to seep into all facets of life, critical scholars increasingly aim to unpack the harms of assuming that market theory logics can be used to eradicate social inequalities inside and outside of the classroom.⁶³ Given the prevalence of whiteness and its new, persuasive manifestation through neoliberalism, we posit that music can become a site through which audiences learn from movement intellectuals that reflect the counter-narratives expressed by Black artists. In 2019, it becomes ever-more urgent that movement intellectuals in popular music educate their audiences on counter-narratives to White supremacy. What follows are more suggestions for the future direction of musical artists, rhetorical critics, and students.

“If You’re Ready (Come Go With Me)”

Stewart and colleagues note how “songs give persuaders a poetic license to challenge, exaggerate, and pretend in ways that audiences would find unacceptable, unbelievable, or ridiculous if spoken or written in prose.”⁶⁴ Fifty years after Dr. King’s assassination, contemporary musical artists continue to find a way to carry on his message. Critiquing injustices through music allows movement intellectuals to reach an audience in a time and space where entertainment and mobilization become one. As Irvine and Kirkpatrick note, “music derives its rhetorical impact from the participatory insight that is developed in the formation of implicative meaning in both the artist and the listener.”⁶⁵ That is, through music itself, the artist can spark the critical-consciousness of their listeners by paying attention to how oppression manifests. In a way, the movement intellectual in popular music becomes what Black calls a, “mimetic-orator.”⁶⁶ It is through mimetic-oration that the Black vernacular can openly critique injustices that permeate into the “mainstream” public.⁶⁷

Movement intellectuals in popular music seek to raise a critical consciousness within their audiences through sharing counter-narratives. Throughout this criticism, we explored how musical artists from Chicago use their platform as a means to carry on Dr. King’s legacy as he left us. That is, we attempt to reframe Dr. King’s legacy through his critical-structuralist turn. The night before his death, Dr. King gave a speech to a workers’ union strike that sought to promote equitable working conditions. Two years prior, Dr. King visited Chicago where he witnessed how racism manifested in a different variation through poor living conditions. As such our criticism hopes to demonstrate the work of Chicago artists who carried on Dr. King’s legacy through their counter-narratives to the manifestation of White supremacy. In doing so, we hope to reframe Dr. King’s legacy from what we learned about his rhetoric within our K-12 public education.

⁶² David Gillborn, “Education Policy as an Act of White Supremacy: Whiteness, Critical Race Theory, and Educational Reform,” *Foundation of Critical Race Theory in Education* (2nd ed.), eds. Edward Taylor, David Gillborn, and Gloria Ladson-Billings (New York: Routledge, 2016), 43-59.

⁶³ Robert Asen, “Introduction: Neoliberalism and the Public Sphere,” *Communication and the Public*, X (2018): 1-5. doi: 10.1177/2057047318794687; Richard Delgado, “Rodrigo’s Roadmap: Is the Marketplace Theory for Eradicating Discrimination a Blind Alley?” *Nw. U. L. Rev.*, 93 (1989-1999): 215-45. [https://heinonline.org/HOL/LandingPage?handle=hein.journals/illlr93&div=11&id=&page=](https://heinonline.org/HOL/LandingPage?handle=hein.journals/illlr93&div=11&id=&page=;); Norman Fairclough, “Language in New Capitalism.” *Discourse & Society* 13 (2002): 163-6. doi: 10.1177/0957926502013002404

⁶⁴ Charles J. Stewart, Craig Allen Smith, and Robert E. Denton Jr., *Persuasion and Social Movements* (Waveland Press, 2012), 201.

⁶⁵ Irvine and Kirkpatrick, 273.

⁶⁶ Black, 167.

⁶⁷ Craig, 26.

Whiteness ideology manifests through strategic rhetorical moves.⁶⁸ One way in which whiteness manifests is through the removal of a White actor that enforces systems of oppression. With the focus of Dr. King's legacy on his "I Have a Dream" speech, what often gets left out is the White oppressor. As such, we turn our attention back onto White supremacy as it manifests through systematic oppression. Artists such as Sam Cooke, the Staple Singers, and Curtis Mayfield witnessed the civil rights movement of the 50s and 60s as it occurred. Their music mirrored the movement and subsequently the movement after Dr. King's assassination. After Dr. King's assassination, the Staple Singers and Mayfield adopted Black pride into their music and actively challenged systemic oppression.

More contemporary artists such as Common, Lupe Fiasco, and Chance the Rapper continue to approach their music with a critical eye. The challenges Black artists face today are different than the challenges of those from artists in the 50s, 60s, and 70s. However, as Cornel West advises, we should learn from freedom fighters of the past to inform our continued pursuit for social and economic justice today. Contemporary artists from Chicago, and beyond, can learn from artists of the past. For example, in the past, creating your own record label was a way to empower disenfranchised artists. However, with the Telecommunications Act of 1996, radio airwaves are now controlled by a limited number of capitalists who benefit from a free market.⁶⁹ As such, artists like Lupe Fiasco and Chance the Rapper are aware of the constraints placed on them by record label's pressures to perform a certain way. Rather than pursuing his own record label, Chance the Rapper opts to remain as an independent artist.

In addition to economic empowerment, as Dr. King advocated, contemporary artists engage in public education. Through critical media literacy, artists can use their music to inform a broad audience that may not have otherwise been exposed to a message. In returning to K-12 public education, schools maintain that Dr. King's legacy is as follows: "I have a dream that my four little children will one day live in a nation where they will not be judged by the color of their skin, but by the content of their character."⁷⁰ However, movement intellectuals in popular music have the opportunity to recreate Dr. King's message through their alternative means of public education through music. Sharing critical-structuralist messages has the potential to raise the critical consciousness of listeners. This critical consciousness never manifests in K-12 public education when Dr. King's legacy is taken up through a color-blind ideology.

Artists in the future should consider the implications of their musical careers. Whether it be in through record labels or through their lyrical content, artists have the opportunity to reinforce or challenge color-blind ideology. While challenging White supremacy comes with personal and professional risk, it was a risk emulated by Dr. King in the 50s and 60s. In 1968, Dr. King fell victim to the ultimate risk of self-sacrifice at the hands of White supremacy and a White supremacist. In pursuing systemic critique, Dr. King mobilized followers to raise an awareness as a means to challenging systemic oppression. This legacy, while empowering, can become lost over time if not carried on. Musical artists have the means to carry on this legacy through their music. However, artists must be willing to take on the same risk as Dr. King. In his "Mountaintop" speech, Dr. King states,

⁶⁸ Thomas K Nakayama and Robert L. Krizek, "Whiteness: A Strategic Rhetoric," *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 81 (1995): 291-309. doi: 10.1080/00335639509384117

⁶⁹ Tony H. Grubestic, "Future Shock: Telecommunications Technology and Infrastructure in Regional Research." In *Regional Research Frontiers-Vol. 1: Innovations, Regional Growth and Migration*, ed. Randall Jackson and Peter Schaffer (Switzerland: Springer International Publishing, 2017), 52-3.

⁷⁰ King, "I Have Been to the Mountaintop."

Somewhere I read of the freedom of press. Somewhere I read that the greatness of America is the right to protest for right....We need all of you. And you know what's beautiful to me is to see all of these ministers of the Gospel. It's a marvelous picture. Who is it that is supposed to articulate the longings and aspirations of the people more than the preacher? Somehow the preacher must have a kind of fire shut up in his [sic] bones. And whenever injustice is around he tell it.⁷¹

While artists may not be preachers in a religious sense, they may certainly be preachers in a secular world. The Staple Singers enact King's quote through their song, "Just Another Soldier:" "Now Martin, John, and Bobby, once fought here by my side, but the captain called them to that command post in the sky. This army need you my friend, this army need me, and I believe if we all get together right now, hatred will cease to be." Contemporary artists can answer the call in joining the war against oppression. Through adopting critical-structuralist messages in their lyrics, artists can work to pursue this end.

Finally, rhetorical scholars should purposefully and reflexively decenter and critique whiteness in their own work. With the frameworks of critical race theory and vernacular rhetorics specifically, we can bring to light and expand what has historically been assumed to be rhetorical discourse "worthy" of analysis and reflection. For us, this includes citing scholars of color in our own syllabi and research. This becomes an ethic rather than a citational politic when such work is heavily, if not primarily, used to inform our own teaching and research. Knowing the whiteness that is privileged in public, K-12 education, we utilize our positions within higher education to challenge what has been presented to our predominately White students as neutral, and more dangerously unspoken. Ultimately, we demonstrate that students can learn from the counter-narratives of artists of color generally, and Black artists specifically. Additionally, we advocate that students can complement their formal education with music—a vernacular education that circulated throughout the public. When taken together, students can continually unsettle their assumptions through critical self-reflexivity as a means to inform new ways of being within a dominant structure of whiteness and White supremacy.

⁷¹ Ibid.