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A THESIS BY
TAMAR BALLARD

“I HOPE Y’ALL HEAR ME”

CHICAGO HIP HOP & COUNTER-NARRATIVE





**“THEY SAY I'M INFECTED, THIS IS
WHY I INJECT IT
I HAD IT ABORTED, WE GOT
DEPORTED
MY LAPTOP GOT SPYWARE, THEY
SAY THAT I CAN'T LIE HERE
BUT I GOT NO PLACE TO GO
I CAN'T STOP EATING, MY BEST
FRIEND'S LEAVING
MY PASTOR TOUCHED ME, I LOVE
THIS COUNTRY
I LOST MY EARPIECE, I HOPE
Y'ALL HEAR ME
'CAUSE IT HURTS ME SOUL.”¹**



LEARN
SSA

79th St
EVANS St

GREATER IN HOPE
HOLINESS CHURCH

DO NOT
ENTER

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AFFIRMATION BY EVE EWING⁴

SPEAK THIS ONTO YOURSELF
UNTIL YOU KNOW IT IS TRUE.

I BELIEVE THAT I WOKE UP TODAY
AND MY LUNGS WERE WORKING,
MIRACULOUSLY,

MY VOICE CAN SING AND MURMUR AND ASK,
MIRACULOUSLY.

MY HANDS MAY SHAKE, BUT THEY CAN HOLD
ME OR ANOTHER.

MY BLOOD STILL CARRIES THE GIFTS OF AIR
FROM MY HEART TO MY BRAIN,
MIRACULOUSLY.

PUT A FINGER TO MY WRIST OR MY TEMPLE
AND FEEL IT: I AM MAGIC. LIFE
AND ALL ITS GOOD AND BAD AND UGLY THINGS,
SCARY THINGS WHICH I WOULD LIKE TO FORGET,
BEAUTIFUL THINGS WHICH I WOULD LIKE TO
REMEMBER

- THE WHOLE MESSY LOVELY TRUE STORY OF
MYSELF

PULSES WITHIN ME.

I BELIEVE THAT THE SUN SHINES,
IF NOT HERE, THEN SOMEWHERE.

SOMEWHERE IT RAINS,

AND THINGS WILL GROW GREEN AND WONDERFUL.

SOMETIMES MY INSIDES RAIN FROM THE INSIDE OUT
AND THEN I KNOW

I AM ALIVE

I AM ALIVE

I AM ALIVE

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

THANK YOU TO:

MY MOM – FOR EVERYTHING.

JUSTIN PATCH FOR SHOWING ME THAT MUSIC CAN GO WAY BEYOND JUST LISTENING.

TYRONE SIMPSON FOR SHOWING ME THAT BLACKNESS AND BLACK LIFE HAS A STORY TO TELL AND THAT PEOPLE SHOULD PAY ATTENTION.

CARLOS ALAMO FOR MORE SUPPORT THAN I COULD EVER ASK FOR.

WESLEY DIXON FOR KEEPING MY SPIRIT HIGH AND MY LAUGHS STRONG.

QUINCY MILLS FOR REMINDING ME THAT EVERYTHING I WRITE NEEDS TO BE INTENTIONAL.

SAMSON OPONDO FOR REMINDING ME THAT THERE'S ONLY SO MUCH I CAN WRITE.

LEONARD NEVAREZ FOR INTRODUCING ME TO URBAN STUDIES AND THE IDEA OF MUSICAL URBANISM.

TOIVO ASHEEKE FOR BEING AS EXCITED ABOUT MY THESIS AS I AM.

JAMES BOYD AND CODY HARMON FOR LENDING ME SOURCES.

ABBY BAIRD FOR REMINDING ME THAT MY THESIS DOESN'T HAVE TO BE PERFECT.

ALL OF MY FRIENDS FOR CARE AND LOVE, EVEN AT A DISTANCE.

EVERY BLACK WOMAN ON EARTH FOR JUST EXISTING.

CHICAGO HIP HOP FOR INTRODUCING ME TO ARTISTS AND ART THAT I CANNOT IMAGINE NOT HAVING IN MY LIFE.

ALL OF THE OTHER WONDERFUL PEOPLE THAT ARE IN MY LIFE FOR KEEPING ME GOING.

ME FOR PUTTING MY LOVE OF MUSIC TO ACADEMIC USE.

“ |



HOPE

Y'ALL

HEAR

ME. ”

3

***“THIS LIFE, THIS NEW STORY & HISTORY
YOU CANNOT STEAL OR SELL OR CAST
OVERBOARD OR HANG OR BEAT OR
DROWN OR OWN OR REDLINE OR
SHACKLE OR SILENCE OR CHEAT OR
CHOKER OR COVER UP OR JAIL OR SHOOT
OR JAIL OR SHOOT OR RUIN***

THIS, IF ONLY THIS ONE, IS OURS.”

DANEZ SMITH, “DEAR WHITE AMERICA”³



Cover of Kanye West's *Late Registration* (2005)

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

I was introduced to Chicago hip hop on September 12, 2005, my ninth birthday. Before then, my mom didn't allow me to listen to anything that she didn't approve of, which was anything that wasn't old school r&b or gospel music. She determined that the music wasn't good for me; there were too many curse words, too much degrading of women, and I was too young. She didn't want the mind of her only-child (read: her only chance) to be manipulated by the music. However, I'd get my fix of early 2000s hip hop while riding in the car with my friends and their families or while quickly turning to 95.5 The Beat, the local r&b/hip-hop station in our part of Georgia at the time, as she paid for gas inside a Shell or Chevron not too far from where we lived.

My musical coming-of-age finally happened on my ninth birthday. I unwrapped my presents to find a portable CD player, and several CDs: Mariah Carey's *The Emancipation of Mimi*, Bow Wow's *Wanted*, Usher's *Confessions*, and Kanye West's *Late Registration*. She'd decided to ask some of her co-workers at Circuit City

what the popular albums at the time were, and they'd pointed her towards those four. It was West's *Late Registration* that won me over completely at the end. Over the next year, I never went anywhere without my CD player and that album. I'd take it with me on bike rides around the neighborhood with my friends or to the gazebo in the middle of our apartment complex to listen to it while trying to decipher the names written on its walls and benches; I even took a chance on my life by sneaking it to school a couple of times to show it off to my friends.

The album's intro "Wake Up Mr. West" was something I'd never heard before. The piano loop mixed with Adam Levine's lyrics warning of the temporariness of life and West's verses detailing the lives of his family and the physical and mental degradation in "Heard 'Em Say" – none of which I understood at nine years old – lingered in my mind like the trumpet sample in "Touch the Sky" from Curtis Mayfield's "Move On Top," while Lupe Fiasco's "Bottle-shaped body like Mrs. Butterworth"¹ line from the same song was the most

impressive thing I'd heard in my life so far. His album *Lupe Fiasco's Food and Liquor*, particularly his song "Superstar," would be the next piece of Chicago hip hop that I'd be introduced to.

After that, my exposure to Chicago hip hop was limited to West's and Fiasco's next couple of albums until May 2, 2012. That day, while scrolling through Tumblr, I was introduced to Chance the Rapper's "Pusha Man" and his second mixtape, *Acid Rap*. I would've scrolled past it, like I did most of the music shared by people I follow on Tumblr (I only trust a total of four people's music taste), but the cover art of *Acid Rap* pulled me in. It was a painted portrait of Chance by Brandon Breaux and was filled with various shades of pink and purple, which happened to be my two favorite colors at the time.

After clicking on the play button, I was immediately hit with the glittering synthesizer and piano keys of a pitched down sample of Dave Grusin's "Modaji." I was being transported directly into Chance's world. What really hit me was the part of the song after the 30 seconds of silence in the middle. The instrumental changed to a gloomier, more otherworldly sound with the

help of a sample of Monroeville Music Center's "Hairy Fairy Hotaruna." The lyrics of the song are filled with Chance talking about the paranoia and inevitability of death, the feeling of being trapped in the "ghetto," and the need for the world to pay attention to what's going on in Chicago, particularly to black people in Chicago, in a way that isn't focused on numbers and statistics, but in a way that is centered on the fact that people in the city are suffering and scared. I listened to the rest of *Acid Rap* three times that day.

For the following two years, I would be introduced to Vic Mensa, Saba, Noname, Alex Wiley, Mick Jenkins and projects like *The Water[s]*, *Village Party*, *Innanetape*, *Comfort Zone*, and *LIGHT*; once I found Chance, the treasure of Chicago's up and coming artists was easy to find and easy to unlock. All of these artists would go on to help paint a picture of black Chicago life, through music that sounded like nothing else I had ever heard before. They were showing the world a Chicago that wasn't wrapped up in media hype and over-theorized jargon. Their music told stories of pain, hurt, sadness, joy, and pride. And this thesis is about recognizing that.

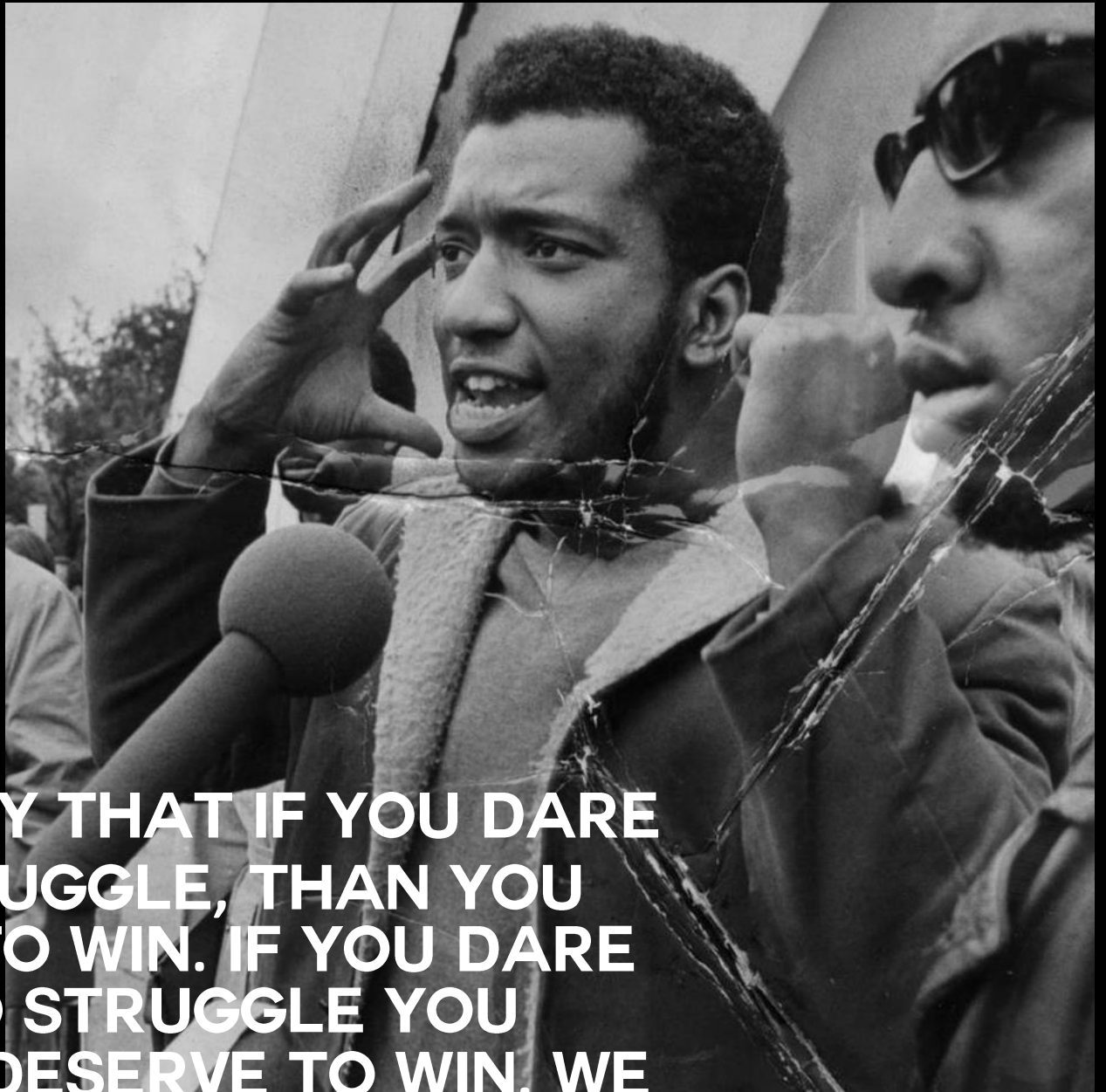
Too many times, black life is allowed to be minimized into 30 second clips of voiceless black bodies in peril that circulate social media, statistics that mark predominately-poor black neighborhoods as dangerous and in a perpetual state of disarray, and news articles and segments that demonize blackness. When black people are allowed to tell their stories, they're told for the benefit of a predominately-white system and a predominately-white audience, very rarely for themselves. They're told to legitimize white fear. They're told to legitimize white supremacy and nationalism. They're told to push us farther and farther from the collective understanding and appreciation for black bodies and the lived experiences that come with them. What I am hoping to explore in the pages of this thesis is the way that young black hip hop artists from Chicago have attempted to reverse dominant black Chicago discourse, in a new and innovative way: a way that doesn't sell out the stories of the people in their communities, a way that brings humanity to black Chicago and to blackness as a whole, and a way that proves that black Chicago

youth are alive and are willing to tell their stories to anyone that will listen, which is easy to do when the music is so good.

“this life, this new story & history you cannot steal or sell or cast overboard or hang or beat or drown or own or redline or shackle or silence or cheat or choke or cover up or jail or shoot or jail or shoot or ruin this, if only this one, is ours.”²
Danez Smith, dear white america

*“The world in my hands, the world in my hands
The world in my hands, the world in my hands
The world in my hands, the world in my hands
The world in my hands, the world in my hands”³*

Saba, “World in My Hands”



“WE SAY THAT IF YOU DARE TO STRUGGLE, THAN YOU DARE TO WIN. IF YOU DARE NOT TO STRUGGLE YOU DON’T DESERVE TO WIN. WE WOULDN’T GO INTO THE RING WITH MUHAMMAD ALI AND NOT FIGHT AND WONDER WHY WE LOST, WOULD WE? IF YOU DON’T FIGHT, THEN YOU DON’T DESERVE TO WIN... ALL POWER TO THE PEOPLE.”⁴

CHAPTER TWO: AN ABBREVIATED HISTORY OF BLACK CHICAGO

After the Chicago Great Fire of 1871, white immigrant communities, including German, Irish, and Scottish immigrants, began to settle in communities outside of the Loop, the city's central business district. The influx of black Americans in this area of the city would occur during the Great Migration, a process that would happen in two waves pre and post-World War I and II and would lead to the creation of two large black communities on the South and West sides. Generally, the early 1900s – the beginning of the first Great Migration – saw the move of black Americans from the South to the North, in hopes of establishing communities in Northern cities that were free from the denial of black personhood and upward mobility that plagued communities in the South.

Though slavery had been outlawed by the Emancipation Proclamation in 1863, Jim Crow laws prevented the movement of black Americans in the South from objecthood to personhood. So, instead of allowing themselves to continue to be

subjected to the lack of freedom and self-determination in the rural South, black Americans began to seek better opportunities in the urban North.

There were several distinct factors that made the urban North a potential settling place for black Americans, including “the recruitment of black workers to Chicago factory industries to act as strikebreakers [and] the increase in work wages relative to the South;”⁵ these pull factors were similar to the ones that were pulling black people to places like Harlem, New York; Detroit, Michigan; and Gary, Indiana. Northern black newspapers, like the *Chicago Defender* and New York's black press, worked to “openly [advocate] urban settlement” for black communities looking to “[change] from farm life to city life.”⁶ For Chicago, the *Defender's* “Great Northern Drive” campaign, advertised Chicago as a new start for black Americans. And because of its promise of better jobs, better housing, better schools, and a better way of life than the one that was available in the South, the

city's South side saw an increase in its black population.

The area of the South side was ideal for the new black Chicagoans because of the quality of life that had been developed by the white immigrant communities who settled in the area before. As more of those white immigrant communities moved to the South side, steel mills and other manufacturing industries moved into those areas, providing job opportunities for those groups; eventually, the number of white immigrants would stabilize. During this time of white settlement, white Americans were simultaneously joining World War I, leaving factory jobs and industry positions open for black Americans who were eager to take them and begin to set up a life in the South side, as they left the Southern states. This introduction of black bodies into white spaces led to hostility in white immigrant communities who saw the black bodies as an invasion or infiltration into their safe spaces. This hostility led to movements like the Chicago Race Riot of 1919. The two week riot, focused primarily on the South side, ended with the deaths of “more than forty [predominately-black] individuals” and

much of the loss of property happening to predominately-black families.⁷ Within the following years of the early 1920s, white Chicagoans would opt to move out of the South side, deciding to find safer and whiter spaces in which they can live and support their families. In the meantime, black Chicagoans began to turn the South side into a home.

This isn't to say, though, that black Chicagoans were completely oblivious to the discrepancies between the resources in their communities and the resources in whiter spaces. By the 1930s, one of the major problems in the area of the South side was overcrowding. Between “1910 and 1920, the black population more than doubled, from 44,103 to 109,594 persons.”⁸ However, the increase of people didn't lead to the increase in living space or the immediate creation of new neighborhoods, leading to the “expansion and increased density of areas in which groups of [black folks] already lived in 1910.”⁹ And “state intervention[s],” like the New Deal, “reinforced the isolated residential enclaves.”¹⁰ One of the programs that was created as a part of the New Deal was the

Home Owners' Loan Corporation program, made for the purpose of handling mortgages and home finance policies. However, HOLC benefits often weren't open to black Americans. Instead, "[HOLC] instituted a redlining policy by developing color-coded maps of American cities that used racial criteria to categorize lending and insurance risks," making it harder for black families to find and keep stable and reliable housing.¹¹

Redlining worked to create a visual representation of what areas were not worth the investment by banks or other financial institutions and represented those areas with red marks on a map; "zones which were to receive preferential lending status were marked in green shading."¹² Oftentimes, this delegation was done racially, rather than economically, in a way that allowed for the disinvestment and pulling of resources in predominately-black, increasingly crowded areas. As a result, black Chicagoans were forced to live in areas that were not only in close proximity to red-light districts (adding to the hedonistic and hypersexualized reputation that black communities in Chicago became synonymous with), but also

areas that lacked public facilities and were filled with dilapidated buildings.

The West side of Chicago developed under an almost identical set of circumstances to the ones that surrounded the creation of the South side. After the Great Fire of 1871, and the consequential destruction of predominately-white communities located outside the Loop, white immigrants were left with the need to find new spaces to live and work. In addition to finding space on the South side, they were also able to find space on the West side. Fast forwarding to the settling of the South side by black Southerners, as the population density increased, black Chicagoans needed a new place to settle; that area became the West side. The movement, just like on the South side, led to some emigration of white migrants (and the industries they set up) to other parts of the city. As the black population began to increase, just as they did on the South side, there was tension between white and black communities that escalated into the Chicago Race Riot of 1968.

As seen in the aftermath of the two Great Migrations, and the subsequent white

flight, part of the reason why these two areas suffered from so much deindustrialization and blight was due to governmental apathy towards the social condition of black Chicagoans, making itself known in various ways including housing, schooling, and employment. The unwillingness of the government to do any work to alleviate sociopolitical and racial pressures faced by the black community made it clear that black people in the North could not depend on government action unless it was in the system's interest. As a result, many black Chicagoans began to take it upon themselves to do the work of prioritizing their own self-interests, including racial justice and . This work played itself out in three specific events in post-World War II events and happenings: the fight for desegregation of Chicago Public Schools, the Chicago Freedom Movement, and the introduction of the Black Panther Party into the city.

Chicago Public Schools and the Fight for Desegregation

“This is a story of the transformation of urban ‘space,’ a process necessarily wrapped up in the perception and the lived

reality of shifting social and political relationships.”¹³

John L. Rury

The negative sociospatial relationship between black and white communities increased by housing played itself out in the public educational system in the city of Chicago. As the number of black residents increased, the number of White residents decreased, a move to Chicago suburbs that caused an imbalance in the ability to thrive that continues to plague Chicago Public Schools (CPS) into the contemporary moment. However, black Chicagoans haven't allowed this inequality to pass by uncontested, in the early 1960s, black – and white – Chicagoans took to the streets to fight for the desegregation of the city's public school system.

Suburbanization and Neighborhood Schools

Benjamin Willis, the superintendent in the early 60s, had a grand vision of a school system where each institution of learning was not only in the community, but of the community. For Willis, this meant two things: the school system would not be

influenced or involved in broader regional or national politics and that students would attend the school that was in there area. At this same time, the process of white suburbanization was happening in Chicago; many upwardly mobile, racially apathetic, white residents were opting to live in the newly formed suburbs, instead of in the cities as black and brown people continued to immigrate into the area; so, “as these people moved to suburbia, the populations of [Chicago] became...poorer and darker in complexion.”¹⁴

This move had direct consequences to the quality of schooling that black and brown kids were able to get in Chicago. All of the investments – both financial and otherwise – began to be stripped away and pushed more into the suburban schools. The city schools were overcrowded (as the number of black Chicagoans continued to increase), understaffed, and under-resourced, and because of Willis’s policy, black students weren’t allowed attend any other school. Instead, trailers – called “Willis Wagons” by opponents – were added to the school lots instead of allowing the students to go attend schools in the

suburbs. This lack of support for the education of black children was unacceptable to both the children and their families, so in 1963, the city saw the rise of the CPS boycott

CPS Boycott

After months of seeing no progress, more than 250,000 black and white students skipped school and took to the streets to protest the conditions of CPS schools in October 1963, setting fire to a Willis wagon in opposition to the dismissal of the concerns of both the students and their families; at the same time, there were white counter-protestors who held smaller demonstrations as Willis attempted a denied resignation, which prompted another demonstration on the side of school protestors. At the same time, Chicago Mayor Richard Daley refused to make any meaningful moves to end school segregation or even to acknowledge there was a segregation issue at all. His neglect towards action put him on the side of the white counter-protestors, who threatened to move towards taking back their support for the Daley political machine were there to be any

changes in the way school zoning was currently implemented.

1966 saw a change in leadership from Willis to James Redmond and a move towards allowing black students a wider range of educational options, though violent white resistance did not allow for a larger-scale desegregation effort. The problems didn't get any better in the following years; eventually white families began to pull their kids out of public schools and into the supposed safety of private schools, leaving the schools in financial crises with few resources available to support the black students who were left to suffer through the hand-me-down institutions, a problem that still exists in recent years. Though there have been school reforms implemented in order to solve the CPS problem, there is still a large discrepancy in the educational resources provided to students of color in the CPS system, compared to the quality of education provided to predominately-white suburban students.

The Chicago Freedom Movement and the Fair Housing Act

“If out of [the Chicago Freedom Movement] came a fair housing bill, just as we got a public accommodations bill out of Birmingham and a right to vote out of Selma, the Chicago movement was a success, and a documented success.”¹⁵

Jesse Jackson

The urban North, though a sanctuary from the tribulations of the Jim Crow South, was riddled with its own problematic tendencies towards the illegitimizing of the citizenship of black Americans, specifically black Chicagoans. Housing worked as a way for black people to seem to be integrated into the Northern states, while steering them to the under-resourced, hand-me-down spaces that were left over from the suburbanization of white Americans, both through subtle (e.g. withholding information about alternative residential spaces) and unsubtle (e.g. redlining) means. By mid-1966, black Chicagoans, spearheaded by Martin Luther King Jr. and the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (a collaboration that called itself the Chicago Freedom Movement (CFM)), began to look for ways to end housing discrimination,

though they experienced many obstacles along the way.

Rocky Start

At the beginning of the movement, Dr. King and the SCLC intended to use the framework in which the Civil Rights Movement was based – one that was based on combating blatant Jim Crow segregation in the South – in order to bring civil rights to the urban North. The specifics of the Jim Crow laws and the explicit racism and discrimination that allowed them to thrive in the South made it easier for Dr. King and his colleagues to find an issue and hold on to it, working to solidify a particular aspect of black Southern life that they could focus their work on improving. The urban North didn't provide those same opportunities. The racism and discrimination of black people in the North, though just as impactful, was more subtle, making it hard for them to find their footing in this new space. It took about two years for the CFM to find its point of purpose, with the group moving from wanting to work on school improvements, then to wanting to 'end [Chicago] slums'¹⁶ and the conditions inside of them, to finally a decision being made to focus on the

elimination of the process of containment and forced navigation of black people to ghettoized spaces in Chicago, a process that took the months between late-1965 and mid-1966. Because of this, the group missed out on valuable working time and an opportunity to connect the work in the South to the work that needed to be done in the North in a more congruent and fluid way.

White Sentiment

A lot of the difficulty in pushing the CFM forward was white sentiment, particularly from Northern residents post-Civil Rights Movement, relating to the time gap between the passage of the Voting Rights Act of 1965 and the Chicago Freedom Movement. Though one would think that the closeness in proximity of time would provide a more positive framework for continued white allyship, many white Americans saw the Chicago Freedom Movement and the push towards open housing as an invitation for black residents to invade their white spaces. Because the implementation of fair housing would disallow the denial of residence based on race or ethnicity, white Northern residents

saw their homes as being in danger of an infestation.

Honeymoon Phase

Along with this, the problems of finding ways for people to feel like they had a stake in the conversation around black Chicagoans and fair housing was just as difficult to arouse in black residents as it was white residents. The black communities in Chicago at that time were still young, having only about 50 years in between this and the first Great Migration. So, there was still a feeling amongst black Chicagoans of optimism, relative to the South. This rose-colored way of viewing the city prevented some black Chicagoans from being able to see that they were still not being offered an equal chance at life as their white counterparts, so when the CFM began to solicit interest and share information, there wasn't as much of a pull as there was in the South. Life was too good for black Chicagoans to risk being involved with a group that was willing to cause what seemed like unnecessary trouble.

Media Attention

The media played an important role in spreading the message of civil rights in 1964 and 1965. Images of innocent, compliant, and nonviolent black bodies being attacked and killed by the state, in the form of military and police officers, raised the hair on the back of the neck of white liberals; people could not believe that their counterparts were being treated so poorly, so that sympathy mobilized people. However, that sympathy didn't exist in 1966, and the media didn't do much to change that. Often the stories of Northern riots, like the ones in Watts and Detroit, were mixing with the nonviolent demonstrations by Dr. King and the CFM. "A number of opponents [of the fair housing bill] implicitly used 'rioters' as a synonym for all African Americans."¹⁷ People couldn't tell what black bodies were "dangerous" and which ones weren't, so they all became dangerous, and the rights that they were fighting for were overshadowed by the seemingly unnecessary violence these black bodies were bringing to the formerly safe white neighborhoods. In order to fight back against this, white residents began to use the same violence that they were accusing the black residents of

inflicting onto them. While members of the CFM demonstrated peacefully and nonviolently in predominately-white neighborhoods, they were met with physical violence by white bodies.

Ultimately, this violence went on to being part of the reason for the passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1968. On top of other reasons including the eventual acknowledgement of the importance of open housing and the possibility of having something to memorialize Dr. King, whose assassination happened only a few months earlier, the fear of the spread of general urban violence caused there to be some conversation and eventual passing of the bill that would finally allow for the illegality of housing discrimination based not only race, but also on things like nationality and color, with ability and gender being added within the following decades. Some people are unsure of the effectiveness of the campaigns done by the CFM, while others attribute the CFM to at least spreading information about the impact of fair housing, regardless of their role in the actual eventual passage of the bill into law. Regardless of the reason, the Civil Rights Act of 1968 removed some

of the legal battles that were in place that kept black Americans from being able to live freely, and even though Martin Luther King, Jr. wasn't around to see the bill make its way completely through Congress, his work in Chicago and his attempt to bring the Civil Rights Movement to the North cannot be ignored.

The Black Panthers in Chicago

“To be black and conscious in America is to be in a constant state of rage.’ Panthers believed the statement to be “very true of black people in general in this country” do to racism and the unequal distribution of wealth.”¹⁸

Jakobi Williams

For some, where the Chicago Freedom Movement lacked, the Chicago Black Panther branch thrived. Upon its formation in 1966 in Oakland by Huey Newton and Bobby Seale, the Black Panther Party was becoming a national phenomenon, sparking curiosity in white communities, and mobilization in black communities. By 1968, a Black Panther Party in Chicago brought about by “Fred Hampton, Bobby

Rush, Bob Brown, Bob Clay, Rufus ‘Chaka’ Walls, Jewel Cook, Drew Ferguson, Henry English [and] others,” officially opened on Chicago’s West Madison Street, after a merger of two unofficial Panther chapters in the city’s South and West sides.¹⁹ Among various other efforts, the Chicago Panthers had a focus on: 1) ending the exploitative reign of businessmen who were taking advantage of the underserved Chicago black communities, 2) targeting the oppressive forces of local and regional politicians, 3) bringing attention to and putting a stop to the brutalization and violence done onto black bodies by police forces, and 4) organizing gangs and ending black on black violence.

The Role of Students

The Illinois Black Panther Party (ILBPP) and its Chicago branch, like the civil rights struggles that were occurring in the city in the late 1960s, was made up predominately of high school and college students. From the ILBPP’s leaders, like Fred Hampton, to the members of the Party who did not participate in formal leadership roles, a large portion of the Party, despite

hopes to engage and recruit more from local black gangs, was made up of Illinois students. These students integrated the leadership and grassroots organizing skills that they polished through school organization in order to do work with the ILBPP. Outside of direct work with the Panthers, Chicago students were continuing their campaigns for school reform, including the hiring and active recruiting of more black teachers, bolstering of the African American curriculum in public schools, the inclusion of a Black Studies department in colleges, and increasing resources directed towards “dilapidated black schools.”²⁰

For Us, By Us

One of the overarching missions for the national Black Panther Party was a focus on self-reliance and intercommunity service. The Black Panthers, like most black residents, were not satisfied with the lack of response and care from state and local governments, so they decided to take matters into their own hands. One of the most important programs that came out of this need and push for black people to be self-reliant in the wake of government ill-

support was the Free Breakfast for Children program. “The program was simple: party members and volunteers went to local grocery stores to solicit donations, consulted with nutritionists on healthful breakfast options for children, and prepared and served the food free of charge.”²¹ Though threats from police and the FBI would eventually led to the ending of the Breakfast program, while it was running, it was one of the many ways that the Panthers were filling the governmental void. Along with the Breakfast program, the Panthers ran dozens of other community programs including health services, a free food program, ambulance services, legal clinics, and a newspaper. By strengthening community works programs like these, the Panthers were able to strengthen the community as a whole, disallowing the prophecy of containment and control by outside forces to further weaken the black communities across the nation and in Chicago.

The Rainbow Coalition

Though the ILBPP was very concerned with that black self-reliance and black empowerment, the group was not

oblivious to the idea of power in numbers. Fred Hampton and other ILBPP leaders made it a point to work as much as possible with community groups outside of themselves. The late 1960s saw the emergence of the Rainbow Coalition, a multiracial, cross-neighborhood, cross-organizational entity that was dedicated to “[fighting] for political power that was denied to [all of the groups represented under the coalition] and significantly [reducing] the rigid racial and ethnic tension between these groups.”²²

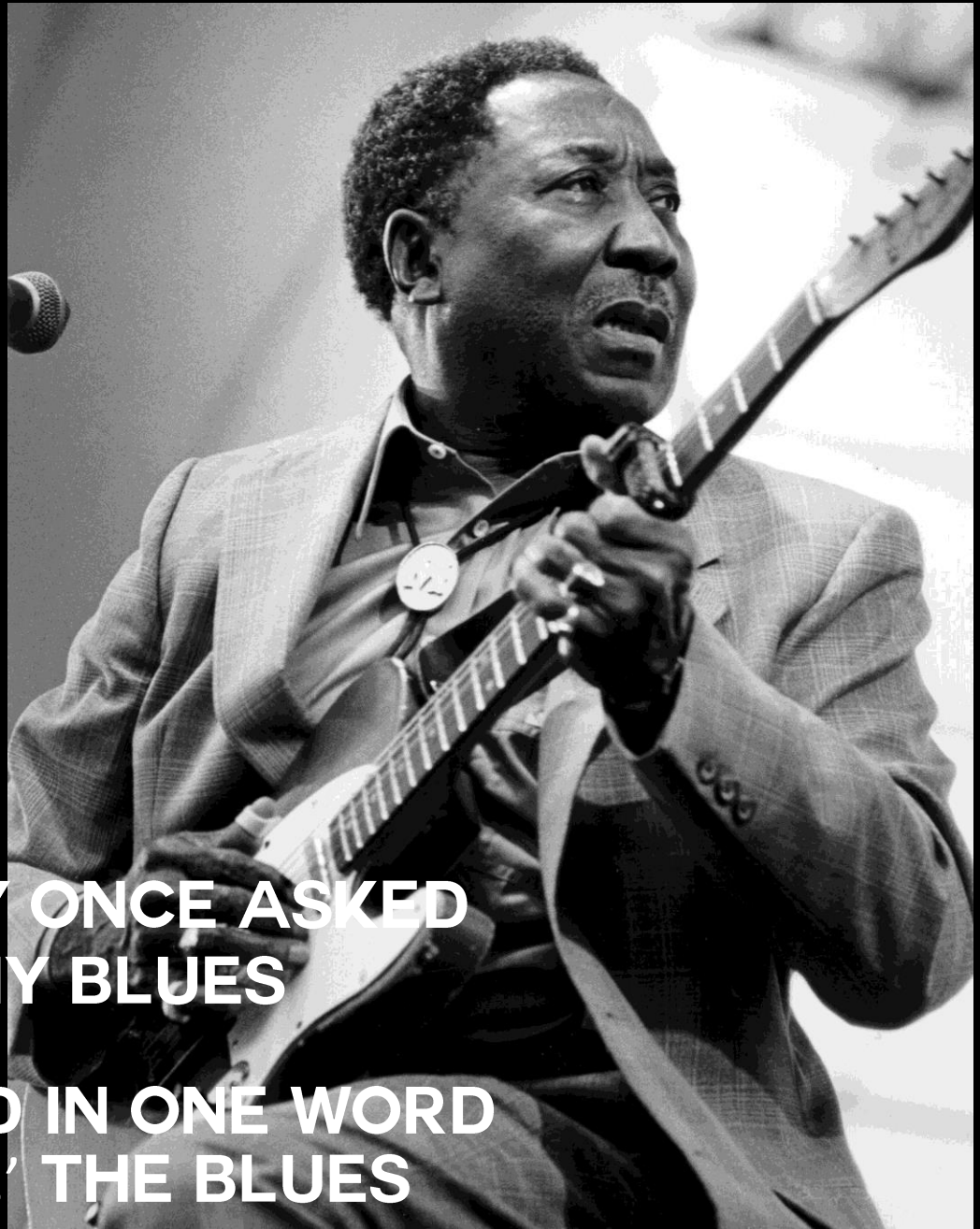
Among the groups represented in the coalition were, the ILBPP (which led, but did not head the group), the Young Lords “a socially conscious Puerto Rican gang,” the Young Patriots “a gang of Appalachian white migrants,” and Rising Up Angry “a club of local greasers from Logan Square.”²³ The Coalition met often to communicate what was going on in their respective neighborhoods, plan joint campaigns, and discuss regional and national issues. Representing the future of Chicago that they were hoping to one day see, the Coalition emerged during a time of heightened racial and class tension in the

60s and early 70s, a future that eventually gained momentum in other parts of the country, with the creation of other iterations of the Rainbow Coalition. And though not as successful in other incarnations across the U.S. as it was in Chicago, the Rainbow Coalition stood for a level of cross-community organization that, while cognizant of the differences in experience that existed within the communities, did not let those get in the way of doing the work that was needed to fight against the pressures of urban renewal and government apathy.

Even though the reign of the ILBPP ended with the events following the assassination of Fred Hampton in 1969, the role that the ILBPP and the Black Panther Party as a whole played in the country is undeniable. Through the creation, implementation, and maintenance of several community works programs, as well as the work of the Rainbow Coalition, the Black Panther Party showed the power that a self-sustaining, self-empowered community can have, sentiments that were in direct opposition to those that were attempted to be cultivated by state and local political systems, but those that were being cultivated

in kids and adults during the boycotts of the Chicago Public School system and in the demonstrators who worked towards the creation of the Civil Rights Act of 1968. Black vocalization did the work of changing the course of black history in Chicago, in a way that exists not only in moves towards mobilization and “take to the streets” activism, but also in the arts movements that were happening in Chicago around the same time, a history that dates as far back as the first Great Migration and as far forward as Chicago’s present moment.

Though not an extensive view of Chicago’s post-WWII history, the boycott of the Chicago Public Schools system, the Chicago Freedom Movement, and the Illinois chapter of the Black Panther Party all serve as moments where black Chicagoans have taken their fate into their own hands, an act of agency that goes directly against what being delegated to the under-resourced, under-serviced areas in which they were forced to live was meant to do. This push of black Americans into the streets of Chicago gave them an opportunity to write their own stories, in a way that altered the course of their history.



**“SOMEBODY ONCE ASKED
ME WHAT MY BLUES
MEANT.
I ANSWERED IN ONE WORD
– ‘TROUBLE.’ THE BLUES
BELONG TO MY PEOPLE.
THE BLUES ARE AN
EXPRESSION OF TROUBLE
IN MIND, TROUBLE IN BODY,
TROUBLE IN SOUL. AND
WHEN MAN HAS TROUBLE,
IT HELPS HIM TO EXPRESS
IT, TO LET IT BE KNOWN.”²⁴**

CHAPTER THREE: THE SOUND OF THE CITY

Black Chicago music has had a storied history of acting as a place of resistance and vocalization. Blues, house, and hip hop have all served, in some way, to provide an outlet for communities that have always had their existences questioned and delegitimized. Countless musicians, artists, lyricists, singers, and rappers have made their voices heard in the fight for both freedom of expression and freedom to live. It's through the journey of learning the histories of these genres that we see hip hop as a part of a lineage of musical forms that have shaped cultures of resistance and unyielding fights for agency and self-determination.

The Blues

“Somebody once asked me what my blues meant. I answered in one word – ‘trouble.’ I don’t know whether they got the message but what I meant was that the blues – from the gut-bucket, alley blues which I can offer right straight up to the sophisticated, drawing room lament fashioned by that

master musician, Duke Ellington – the blues belong to my people. The blues are an expression of trouble in mind, trouble in body, trouble in soul. And when man has trouble, it helps him to express it, to let it be known.”²⁵

Muddy Waters

Though chattel slavery had officially been outlawed, black Americans were still subject to mistreatment and discrimination in the post-Emancipation South. Denial of voting rights, physical violence, and denial of upward mobility caused many black Southerners to lose faith in finding liberty in the South. They dreamed of a land flowing with milk and honey, a place where freedom and the rights that come with it could be fully realized. They saw that dream in the North; they saw that dream in Chicago. So in the early 1900s, black Southern people began their exodus to the North.

*I’m tired of this Jim Crow, gonna leave this
Jim Crow town,
Doggone my black soul,
I’m sweet Chicago bound,*

Yes I'm leavin' here from this ole

*Jim Crow town.*²⁶

Charles "Cow Cow" Davenport, "Jim Crow Blues"

Before the Civil War, the black population in Chicago was never more than 1% of the total population of the city. Once talks of the possibility of economic and social freedom in the North began to make its way through the grapevine of black Southern life that number began to rise. According to William Barlow's "'Looking Up at Down: Chicago Blues,'" there were several factors that were pulling black people to the Northern states, particularly to Chicago: the recruitment of black workers to Chicago factory industries to act as strikebreakers, the increase in work wages relative to the South, and "The Great Northern Drive" led by the black-owned newspaper, *The Chicago Defender*. Once the migration process started, it happened in droves. Thousands of people made the trek from their former Southern homes to the budding black community in the South side.

However, the new black Chicagoans quickly realized running away from the South, didn't mean that they were fully

running away from the nationalist nature of anti-black regimes. The South side's proximity to red-light districts, the lack of public facilities and resources, overcrowding, and the dilapidated state of the buildings where black people were delegated to, proved that white Chicagoans, especially the recently immigrated white European communities, were no more supportive than the white Southerners that the black community was used to. Instead of welcoming the black immigrants into their growing neighborhoods, the white residents considered the influx of black bodies as an infestation, and took every opportunity they could to place barriers between themselves and their black counterparts. In fact, this relationship turned violent during the years between 1917 and 1919, with racial tension taking a physical turn in the form of assaults, bombings of black housing and businesses, and damaging of black-owned property by white people. But the black residents took that opportunity to lean on each other, using community organizations, churches, and other working groups to provide themselves with the resources that were not being afforded to them.

These opportunities to lean on each other led to the creation of the blues industry in black Chicago. Black Southerners didn't just bring themselves to the North, they brought their culture as well, including the music. By mixing the sounds of the rural South, especially from the Mississippi Delta, with the sounds of the urban North, black Chicagoans were able to create a unique sound that was a fusion of those two worlds. Harmonicas, heavy bass, acoustic guitars, pianos, and looming drums accompanied the blues vocalists as they spoke of the violence, tension, and passion of black love.

Italian and Jewish mobsters and underground dealers like Al Capone used the appeal of blues music to sell an experience to white audiences looking for ways to indulge in the sexuality of blues music, and by extension, black life. That isn't to say that blue musicians weren't using their platform as a mode of "social commentary," though. Several artists including Big Bill Broonzy would use their music to voice their concerns about the treatment of black Americans, offering personal narratives on racism and

discrimination, but these records would still attract the eager ears of white listeners.

*"They say if you's white, you's alright,
If you's brown, stick around,
But if you're black, mmm brother, get back,
get back, get back."*²⁷

Big Bill Broonzy, "Black, Brown, and White"

Saloons, clubs, and bars became the settings for the indulgence in black life and black sound by non-black patrons. While white audiences weren't willing to engage in working towards community building and allyship with black people, they were more than willing to engage in the exotic and "carefree hedonism"²⁸ that came to be synonymous with blackness, particularly black malehood. Because the music became so popular across races, the commercial blues industry concocted a blues formula in the 1920s – "an eclectic potpourri of rural and regional styles overlaid with the influences of vaudeville blues [and] Tin Pan Alley lyrics"²⁹ – that allowed for the rapid production and release of blues music, the standardization of the genre leading to some of the "unique regional styles and themes

that had been brought to Chicago from the rural South [to] disappear.”³⁰

However in the mid-1920s and into the 1930s, the blues industry suffered from effects of the Great Depression as did the music industry as a whole. Not only did the Depression affect the production and release of the music, but it also left many black Chicagoans without jobs in the domestic and service sectors where they were predominately employed.

“The black community in Chicago was hard hit by the depression of the 1930s.

The economic foothold they had managed to secure for themselves during World War I and the Jazz Age gave way to an unescapable downward cycle of unemployment and poverty. The optimism of the recently arrived African American migrants was replaced by dismay, and then by angry resolve to survive.”³¹

When New Deal programs were put in place, they did alleviate some of the economic distress that many Americans found themselves in. The music industry, like most other industries, did find some relief and prosperity post-Depression. “The

New Deal slowly revived Chicago’s dormant music business. Federal jobs and welfare checks revitalized the cash flow on the Southside, pumping new life into the clubs, theaters, and record companies.”³² Despite this, there was a shift in tone of the music that was coming from black blues musicians. The skepticism and “grim realism” that was rearing its head in the personal lives of the community was also starting to make itself known in the music that was being produced.³³

Artists began to make it a point to address concerns about the effectiveness of the newly-implemented New Deal programs and the perceived lack of investment by federal and state governments in black livelihood. Several artists made songs that expressed their need to return to the South, in an attempt to leave behind the empty promise of socioeconomic mobility – and to some extent, racial transcendence – that the North gave. The music allowed for a safer mode of expressing these frustrations, a way to covertly air their grievances surrounding the conditions of their housing, jobs, and overall wellbeing “under the guise of

entertainment.”³⁴ The commercialization of blues that started in the 1920s did not stop the communal relatability and the utility of blues music to amplify the voices of black people and black experiences.

As another wave of black migrants came from the South to Chicago around World War II, they began to center themselves on the Westside. The move to the Westside led to the emergence of a blues community at the Maxwell Street Market. The open-air thrift market, an economic hub for Jewish merchants, was transformed into a blues mecca. Black musicians and listeners from all over the country flocked to the Maxwell Street Market to bask in the sound of authentic Chicago blues, which by this time, had matured into a “hard-drive, electric, urban folk blues” that was still able to allow for its use as a sounding board for black existence.³⁵

Though the Maxwell Market Street blues scene wasn’t able to last long before it succumbed to urban renewal and slum clearance programs that were used to make the space more suitable for the needs of the predominately-white University of Illinois at

Chicago community, while it existed it, it was extension of the blues community that formed in the Southside. As black people continued to make their homes wherever they could in Chicago, the blue tradition only strengthened further, solidifying the place of the black community in the Midwestern state and acting as a guiding point to the creation of black music in the area for decades to come.

House

“A lot of people want to put a definition on where house music began and who started it. It started here in Chicago.”³⁶

Robert Williams

The legacy of Chicago house music begins with the history of disco. During the 1960s and 1970s, disco emerged in response to the heteronormative, white-centered urban night scene. Though the genre would eventually find its way into the mainstream, it offered a space for “female, gay, black, and Latin[x] artists”³⁷ to define their identities in a way that wasn’t centered on recreating the dynamic set forth by traditional club culture; dancing and club

life wasn't just for straight, white couples anymore.

However, the reign of disco would attempt to be disrupted during the summer of 1979. Steve Dahl, a radio personality and rock and roll fan, during the period of increased popularity in disco music, was fired from his job at WDAI Chicago after the radio station took more of a disco-oriented turn. Even though he secured another job at a different radio station, WLUP, his resentment for disco continued in on-air rage-sessions that included the destroying of disco records. He took that stunt to a White Sox and Detroit Tigers game on July 12, 1979. Dubbed Disco Demolition Night, WLUP and Dahl hosted an event where, for the price of \$0.98, rock and roll fans could bring a disco record of their choosing and destroy it at Chicago's Comiskey Park. That night, over 50,000 predominantly-white men showed up to pay their disrespects to the genre and to watch Dahl, adorned in a "combat helmet and military jacket,"³⁸ blow up a crate of disco records on the Comiskey Park field.

Though not an obvious disregard for black, Latinx, and LGBTQ life, the destroying of the records sent a clear message to the communities for whom disco was a social platform and a representation of the legitimacy of their experiences.

"At the game was a teenaged usher named Vince Lawrence...then an aspiring musician who was saving up money for a synthesizer, he says he was one of the few African Americans there that night... 'I was faced with some guy rushing up to me, snapping a record in half in my face and going, "Disco sucks! Ya see that?"' Lawrence says. 'Like an overt statement to me like I was inherently disco.'"³⁹

The records that were being destroyed weren't just disco records, though; they were black records; they were funk, soul, and r&b. Lawrence saw Curtis Mayfield and Otis Clay records fall like shooting stars from the sky and into the dirt of the baseball field. It was a physical manifestation of anti-gay, anti-black, anti-Latinx, and anti-woman discrimination and prejudice that existed all over the country, including in segregated Chicago.

After that, black, Latinx, and queer communities were in need of another mode of musical expression. Not only had their music been deemed irrelevant and subordinate to rock music, but “by that time disco was more closely associated with [white] middle-America wedding receptions than the debauched manifestation of tongue-in-cheek eroticism that it once was.”⁴⁰ Black and brown queer communities needed a new sound to let loose to. A few years before Disco Demolition Day, The Warehouse, a black, gay, members-only juice bar, opened up in Chicago’s West Loop. The club would go on to become the birthplace of house music, with DJ Frankie Knuckles as its godfather.

“It wasn’t even called house music back then. It was just ‘music being played at the Warehouse.’ But it became part of my existence. I felt like I had found my tribe. House culture made you different from everybody else. We were the space cadets, the aliens walking around the urban streets of America.”⁴¹

Ron Trent

The history of The Warehouse and its founder Robert Williams have roots in New York City. Williams, after spending his high school years in Chicago, spent time in New York City moving around through some time in law school at Columbia University, joining the Dance Theater of Harlem (after realizing that it was impossible to live a life separated from music and dancing), and working in the New York Department of Probations. During his time at the Department of Probations, he met Larry Levan and Frankie Knuckles. Both Levan and Knuckles had been “wild and truant kids,” but Williams, being close to their ages, saw potential in them, so he decided to take them under his wings as a mentor and counselor. He realized, while working with them, that the teenagers had a similar passion for music and dancing as he did.

In 1975, Williams moved back to Chicago to take care of his mother. Almost immediately, he was hit with how different the club and party scenes were from the ones he was used to in New York City; he and his friends decided to do something about that. They began throwing parties all over the city; one of the party scenes, 206 South

Jefferson Street in the West Loop, became the establishing spot for The Warehouse. Though Williams did DJ at the club in its genesis, he eventually turned to the musical expertise of Frankie Knuckles; he convinced Knuckles, after having the DJ position turned down by Larry Levan, to move to Chicago and partner with him in putting The Warehouse on the map.

In the late 70s, the music Knuckles brought became the basis for house music. The mix of disco, soul, and r&b didn't fall easily on the ears of Chicago listeners in the beginning, but once it did, it took off.

“The sound itself was deceptively simple: a repetitive 4/4 drumbeat punctuated by a high-hat cymbal and, frequently, a funk-up bassline and laser-like synthesizer riff. Knuckles once referred to house as “disco’s revenge” — an indictment of Chicago’s sociopolitical stratification as much as a commentary on the music itself.”⁴²

Gay men of color were able to take and make sonic and physical space for themselves in a way that was reminiscent of the Chicago blues tradition. And it wasn't

something that just stayed in Chicago. By the late 1980s, house began to pop up in European clubs, helping to define the British rave scene, and other centers of urban nightlife in the United States. Though, like the blues, the music would be coopted by white audiences, it never lost its meaning to black and brown queer people; they had found their homes in house music.

Though Chicago house isn't being produced in the same way as in the 70s and 80s, the genre has lived on in various other styles that have used its sound as inspiration or have fused house with other genres of music to create sonic hybrids. House DJs like Frankie Knuckles, Roy Davis Jr., Vince Lawrence and Jesse Saunders became role models for artists and other DJs in the creation of styles like deep house, techno and acid house.

Through the manifestation and development of house music, communities that were considered alien and on the outskirts of what was considered acceptable by mainstream standards created a radical and inclusive space that turned the idea of being an outsider on its head. The

Warehouse, its music, and the genres and clubs that came after them, offered an opportunity for a community to be birthed from communities that were constantly being left behind. That community was one of release, escapism, sensuality, eroticism, and individualism; one that was an “implicit bird-flip in the general direction of anyone who'd ever believed the phrase "disco sucks.”⁴³

Hip Hop

“Chicago has a lot, an infinite list of talent. The one thing about that, especially in hip-hop, is not all talented people are discovered. But in Chicago right now...there is a competitive community – but more important than that there’s a collaborative community where you might discover Mick Jenkins, and then you click around and you discover Noname, and you click around and you discover Chance [the Rapper] and Vic [Mensa] ...It’s like we’re all working together...Chicago’s never really had a time like this in its history.”⁴⁴

Saba

The conversation about hip hop in Chicago starts much like the history of house: it starts with Disco Demolition Day. After disco was declared dead on July 12, 1979, as shards of disco records fell from the sky and onto the field at Comiskey Park, it left a need for a new genre of music that could act as a points of resistance for the black community. In Chicago, that need became house music; in New York that need became hip hop. Hip hop would eventually make waves in Chicago, but for the majority of its development period, much of the conversation was centered on the East and West Coasts, specifically hip hop’s birthplace, New York, and California.

With this, though, Chicago – and the rest of the Midwest – would find its place into rap discourse in the 90s. It would be a few years before hip hop would become so well-regarded in the city, but it still had its shining stars. Artists like Twista, Da Brat, Crucial Conflict, and Common were finding their way into the mainstream and achieving local success in Chicago. Twista was a part of a roster of artists, like Tech N9ne in Kansas City, from the Midwest that were perfecting a fast-paced, precision-based

style of rapping, referred to as choppers. Common's sound was more reminiscent of New York hip hop, adding his voice to the Afrocentric and conscious rap subgenre. His career became one of the first times that Chicago hip hop was taken seriously; it was no longer thought of as just a replication of the other versions of hip hop that were in circulation at the time; Common and Twista helped prove that Chicago could hold its own in the genre that had originally ignored the Midwest as a whole. Chicago hip hop provided a new avenue for public dialogue on community and global issues as well as a space that provided variations on the stylistic aspects of that dialogue.

*"I get down for my grandfather who took my
mama
Made her sit in that seat where white folks
ain't want us to eat
At the tender age of 6 she was arrested for
the sit-ins
And with that in my blood I was born to be
different"⁴⁵
Kanye West, "Never Let Me Down"*

This variety of sound coming out of Chicago would become characteristic of the city's

sonic footprint. The early and mid-2000s saw the rise of Kanye West and Lupe Fiasco. West, with roots in Atlanta, Georgia, came into the game as a producer, working with largely with artists from Jay-Z's Roc-A-Fella Records. Though not taken seriously as a rapper in the beginning, his album *College Dropout* proved that West – and Chicago – could continue to be household name in the 2000s, building on the legacy that Common set forth in the 90s. His music was a mix of neo-soul, classic r&b, and gospel influences, moving the genre into a direction, much like house did in the 70s and 80s, that created fluidity; hip hop didn't just have to sound one particular way anymore, and West was at the helm of that movement.

In his 2005 album *Late Registration*, West helped introduce the hip hop world to Lupe Fiasco in the song "Touch the Sky," a cosign from Jay-Z adding to the legitimacy of Fiasco's talent. His first album 2006's *Food and Liquor* solidified Fiasco's place as a storyteller of black Chicago experiences. Songs like "Kick, Push" and "Kick, Push II" told the story of a community of "misfits and outcasts"⁴⁶ learning to find pride in being different, while he used songs like

“Hurt Me Soul” to tell the story of his difficult love of hip hop and the hardships of children growing up in poor urban areas like parts of the South side and West side, where Fiasco grew up.

*“They took my daughter, we ain't got no water
I can't get hired, their cross on fire
We all got suspended, I just got sentenced
So I got no place to go
They threw down my gang sign, I ain't got no hang time
They talk about my sneakers, poisoned our leader
My father ain't seen me
Turn off my TV 'cause it hurts me soul”⁴⁷
Lupe Fiasco, “Hurt Me Soul”*

Along with a laundry list of other achievements, Fiasco and West’s lyrics provided a firsthand view of poor black Chicago life. All people knew of the city, up until that point, was what they’d seen on news media, the painted picture of a city that was the poster child for the lifeless, black ghetto. Even though there was so much talent coming out of the city, it wasn’t prioritized in the same way cities in New

York and California were. It was seen only as a dumping ground for the poor and black, so Fiasco, West, and others helped thrust authentic Chicago life into the increasingly media and internet-driven society. They were providing something real.

But in 2012, Chief Keef’s music pushed that idea of realness farther than most people were comfortable with at the time. His music began to bring up the question of whether or not it was possible to be *too* real. Keef’s genre of choice was drill. A Chicago-born, heavy-hitting style reminiscent of the trap music coming out of Atlanta from artists like Gucci Mane, Waka Flocka Flame, and Future, drill became the musical embodiment of “Chiraq,” the nickname given to a city that many saw was at war with itself; it was a signal that “the kids [were not] alright.”⁴⁸

*My young boys clap heat
My young boys don't care
Yeah, them O'Block boys savage
Boy, don't go over there
They shootin' shit on site
Guns bangin' like a snare
And if you think that you is tough*

*And you get popped oh well*⁴⁹
Chief Keef, "Savage"

Drill lyrics often include direct references to gun violence, drug abuse, and gang activity of young black men. The music of Keef – who was only 17 at the time his music began to take off – Young Chop, and Fredo Santana confirmed everything mainstream audiences thought about Chicago, particularly young black Chicago youth. And that confirmation helped sell the music. Kids all over the country and all over the world found drill music thrilling, rapping along to lyrics that teleported them to the streets of Chicago, without the threat of the physical harm Keef and others alluded to in their lyrics getting in the way. It allowed audiences to indulge in the music, without needing to indulge in providing solutions to the concerns addressed in the music, much like the work of the blues in the 20s and 30s. All this is happening at a time where hip hop is gaining popularity and is grabbing the ears of youth outside of the inner city and other ghettoized spaces, becoming a worldwide phenomenon.

Along with the rough and heavy sound of drill music, Chicago witnessed an influx of artists who were talking about similar things, but in ways that were more reminiscent of Kanye West and Common. Artists like Chance the Rapper, Saba, Vic Mensa, and Noname, would all have their music begin to circulate on the internet around the same time between 2011 and 2013, their jazz musician friends, including Peter Cottontale and Nico Segal, there to back them up on a sound that was full of the brightness and sentimentality of gospel music and the rhythm and swing of jazz and the blues.

The message of their music is still the same. Chicago is a place that has been built in a way that systematically keeps people of color, particularly black people, in a subordinate position that removes any ability for agency or self-determination. The frustration, anger, and hopelessness play themselves out in gun violence, drug usage, forced nonchalance, and deteriorating mental and physical health. Violence inflicted onto black bodies by other black bodies is real, but so is violence inflicted onto black bodies by white bodies. Death is

something that's introduced to kids at a young age, and even though they learn how to deal with it soon after, it's a haunting, lingering thing.

But even with all of the socioeconomic and socioracial issues that make it into the lyrics of songs like Chance the Rapper's "Pusha Man" where he talks about how "everybody [dies] in the [heat of Chicago's] summer[s]"⁵⁰ and Noname's "Shadow Man" where she talks about her hopes to have "Kanye [do the] eulogy"⁵¹ at her funeral, these artists make it a point to bring color to the conversations that are had about Chicago. Part of the idea of breaking down the mainstream narrative of Chicago is allowing the city to speak for itself, in whatever form that vocalization needs to take. While each artist gives their commentary on the problems that Chicago has, they are just as willing to remind listeners of the joy that black people in Chicago have, both in their music and music videos. The point is that they are prioritizing the experiences and voices of black Chicagoans in the work that they do. Whether it's Chief Keef, Kanye West, or Chance the Rapper, each artist has a

Chicago that they'd like to share with the world, a Chicago that rarely gets to see the light of day: their Chicago.

They was talking 'woo this woo wap da bam'

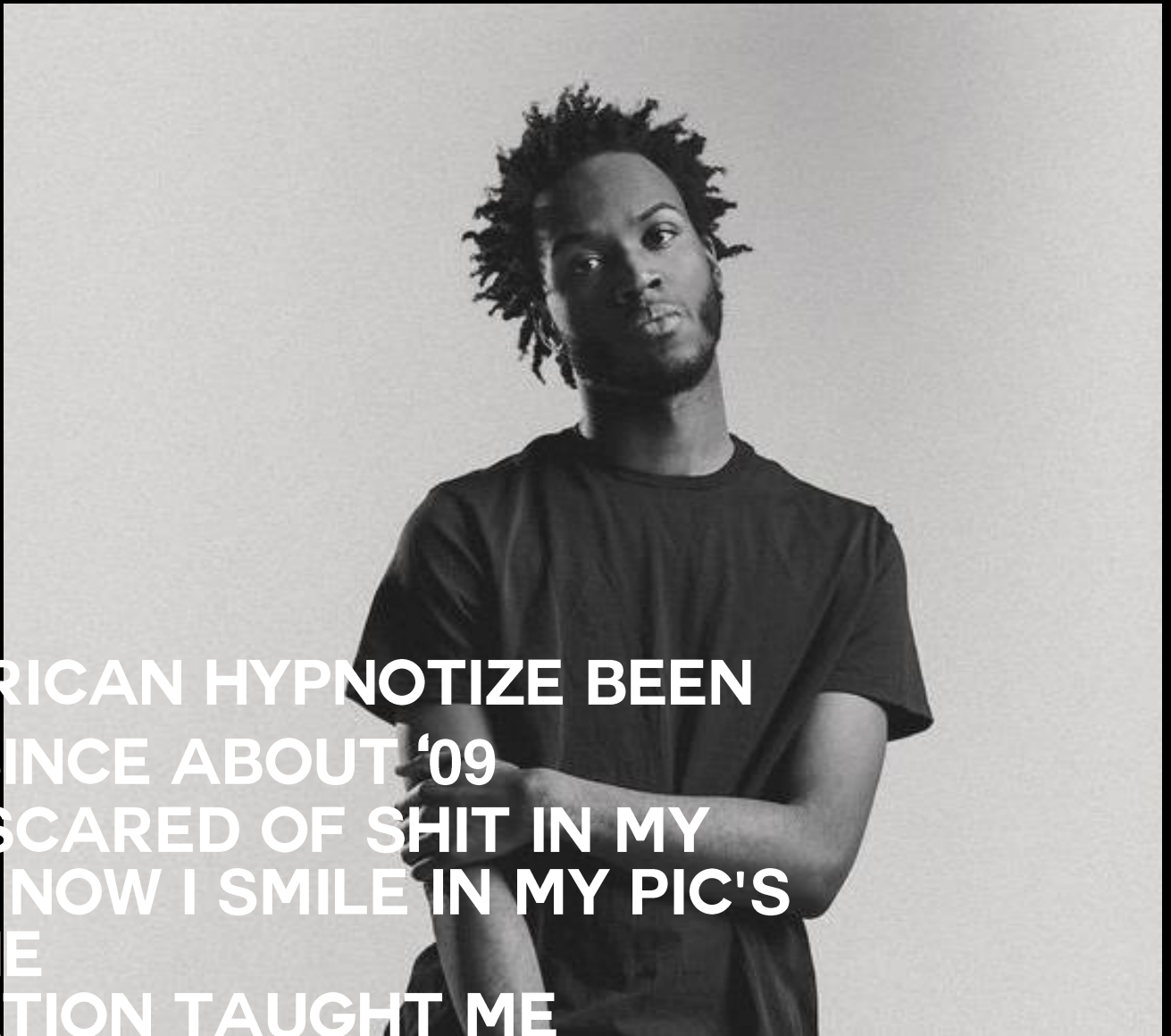
*City so damn great, I feel like Alexand'
Wear your halo like a hat, that's like the latest fashion*

*I got angels all around me they keep me surrounded*⁵²

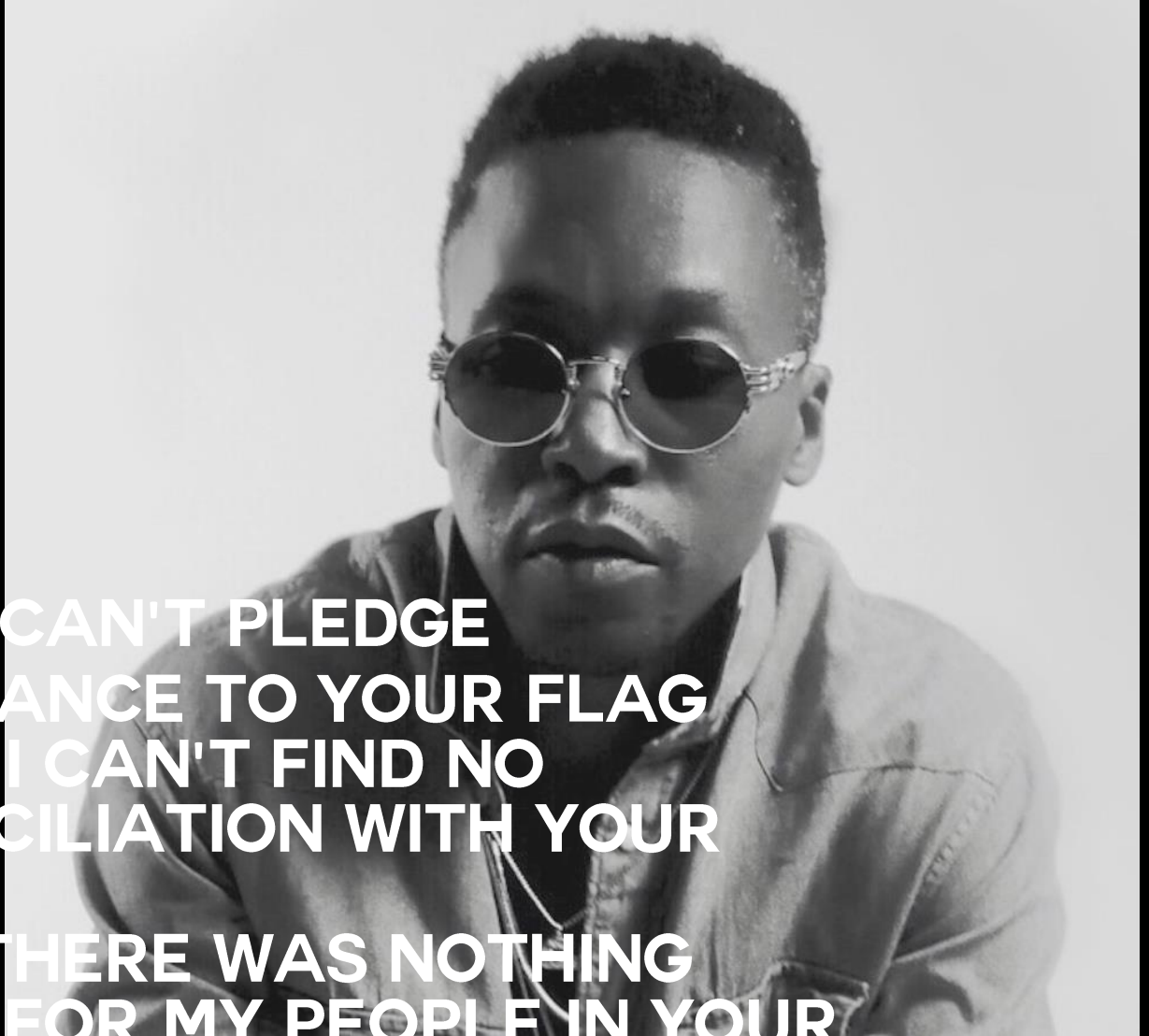
Saba, Chance the Rapper's "Angels"

In the following chapters, I'll pair the voices and experiences of these black Chicago artists with the theoretical frameworks of social death, differential inclusion, interiority, and historical and contemporary black feminism to paint a picture of black Chicago that takes into account the sorrows, joys, and missing pieces in the story of black Chicago. This includes a look into black social and physical death using the work of Saba and Lupe Fiasco, a look into black joy and radical black happiness using the work of Chance the Rapper and Tobi Lou, as well as the missing voice of black women in the story of black Chicago using the work of

Noname. By bringing attention to these three areas of black Chicago life, my hope is to acknowledge and continue the work of presenting black Chicago in a way that is centered around humanity. And this work doesn't necessarily dispute the broader narratives of Chicago, but it does attempt to offer a more comprehensive view of the South and West sides that includes and prioritizes the voice of black Chicago.



**“AMERICAN HYPNOTIZE BEEN
SAD SINCE ABOUT ‘09
WAS SCARED OF SHIT IN MY
MIND, NOW I SMILE IN MY PIC'S
ONLINE
ISOLATION TAUGHT ME
PATIENCE 'BOUT THE WAY TO GO
HAD TO LEARN MY MAMA
DEPRESSION WASN'T MY OWN
HAD TO FEEL THE PRESSURES OF
THE PESSIMISM
TRYING TO CONVINC ME THAT
REALISM WAS A BETTER VISION
NEVER BEEN ACCEPTED IN THE
GHETTO, BUT I'M ON DIVISION
AND I'M LIVIN'.”⁵³**



**"NOW I CAN'T PLEDGE
ALLEGIANCE TO YOUR FLAG
CAUSE I CAN'T FIND NO
RECONCILIATION WITH YOUR
PAST
WHEN THERE WAS NOTHING
EQUAL FOR MY PEOPLE IN YOUR
MATH
YOU FORCED US IN THE GHETTO
AND THEN YOU TOOK OUR DADS
THE BELLY OF THE BEAST, THESE
STREETS ARE DEMONS' ABS
I'M TELLING YOU THAT SETUP IN
THEM SIT-UPS IS SO SAD
THE SYSTEM IS A SLAB,
CORRUPTION IS THE SWINGER
SITTING HIGH RIDING DIRTY,
DRAG RACING INTO DANGER."⁵⁴**

CHAPTER FOUR: BLACK (SOCIAL) DEATH

“If the ghetto lose, that mean the ghetto won.”

*Lupe Fiasco*⁵⁵

For Saba and Lupe Fiasco, growing up on the West side of Chicago meant growing up around “funeral home[s], church[es],”⁵⁶ “food and liquor stores,”⁵⁷ “Harold’s Chicken,”⁵⁸ “prisons packed [and] bubblin’ over in brown sugar,”⁵⁹ black death, and Death’s familiarity with black life. Conversations about black death and Death’s proximity are central in both “LIFE,” from Saba’s *Care for Me*, and “Deliver,” from Lupe Fiasco’s *Tetsuo and Youth*. In these songs, and the albums that these songs find home on, both artists not only talk about the normalization of physical black death, but also the normalization of (and society’s dependence on) social black death.

Because we tend to engage with black Chicago, more broadly, in conversations about sociopolitical and racial

conditions that black people in the South and West sides are forced to live with, it’s easy to come to the conclusion that we know everything we need to know about the black condition in Chicago. However, because we engage with a lot of this information through mediated sources like the news or scholarly texts, we often don’t hear firsthand stories about how those sociopolitical and racial pressures affect the people who live with them, and Lupe Fiasco has made that work a priority in his 19 year long career. During the span of the seven albums he’s released between 2005 and 2018, Lupe has addressed a variety of topics like police brutality, planned obsolescence and capitalism, weaponization of religion, and the relationships that children have on both sides of gun violence. On 2015’s *Tetsuo and Youth*, the album acting as the end of a turbulent relationship between him and Atlantic Records, Lupe takes on many of these same topics, with a conversation about black social death occupying the musical space of “Deliver,” the twelfth song from the album.

Two years before the release *Tetsuo and Youth*, Lupe took to Twitter to offer an apology to the nationwide community of pizza delivery persons, extending a sincere apology on behalf of “the hood...in hopes of repairing a once fruitful alliance.”⁶⁰ Fans took this sentiment as an opportunity to share their personal stories; some shared stories of delivering pizzas and feeling unsafe because of the supposed danger in the neighborhood they were delivering in, while others shared times where they failed to receive their pizza because of the reputation of their home community. Other than a few comments asking fans to elaborate on their stories, Lupe did not engage much with what he referred to as the “ItsRealian-Pizzastilian conflict”⁶¹ until the release of his song “Deliver,” both in its single form in 2014 and as a part of the entire *Tetsuo and Youth* album in 2015.

When the entire album is played backwards, as Lupe has alluded is the correct way to listen to the album⁶², “Deliver” follows “Madonna (and Other Mothers in the Hood)” – an ode to working-

class mothers – as the aforementioned Madonna-figure⁶³ mourns the death of a son that she recently lost to neighborhood violence towards the end of the song.⁶⁴ The scene continues, with “Deliver,” where Lupe’s onomatopoeic “[pows],” acting as “30-something shots from [a] ghetto gun,” continue the visions of the gun violence that took Madonna’s son’s life.⁶⁵ The song continues with Lupe touching a variety of aspects of life in West side Chicago. Within the first verse of the song, Lupe references the word “ghetto” 25 times, a descriptor that classifies both people and objects. He questions “where the ghetto from?” but also proclaims to be “from the ghetto,” a recognition of social condition that plays itself out in all aspects of black (“ghetto”) Chicago life.⁶⁶ The song continues with Lupe’s hook, accompanied by Los Angeles’s Ty Dolla \$ign, where he attempts to figure out why “the pizza man don’t come here no more.”⁶⁷ He offers his own interpretation of the neglect as there being “too many niggas gettin’ shot...[or] robbed” and the inability of people in his neighborhood to maintain jobs or financial

standings that allow them to take care of their families.⁶⁸ As the song progresses, Lupe continues to explore these moments of what W.E.B. du Bois describes as double consciousness, an awareness of both how one sees and is seen. In *Social Death*, sociologist Lisa Marie Cacho discusses the role in “double consciousness [as explaining] how we might interpret reading stories and seeing photographs through how we imagine what other audiences see, read, and transparently recognize.”⁶⁹

That “other” is necessarily an Other that is recognized as being in a higher social standing. That recognition is, as a result, also an admission of submission and subjection, two things that sociologist Orlando Patterson in *Slavery and Social Death* explains are necessary towards the master-slave relationship, or the dominant-submissive relationship. He explains that this relationship can’t work if the slave refuses to be a slave and if there’s no other non-slave person around to defend the relationship. If enslaved bodies are under the impression that they deserve more, they’ll be empowered to ask for more. Sociologist

Yen Le Espiritu describes this as “differential inclusion,” the need to have a subordinate class, in order to sustain a dominate class.⁷⁰ In order for this process to work, there has to be a recognition of how important the disadvantaged group is to the structure of power dynamics of a particular area. Afterwards, comes the active work of keeping this group low on the totem pole, or what Lupe describes as “[making] the ghetto sick [or making] the ghetto numb.”⁷¹ The inability of these communities to fight back against the systemic racism that they’re forced to live under and the recognition of themselves as a subordinate group allows for the maintenance of “[niggas] in the basement [and] white people in the attic”⁷² or as Patterson describes as “placing European[s] on the deck of the slave ship and the Negro in the hold.”⁷³

This is why the effect of double consciousness is so robust; there has to be some recognition of existing under a subjected state, in order for that view of being inferior to hold any weight, and once it does, there’s a process of normalization of white societal domination which Lupe

recognizes in song as moments where behavior is only considered negative when a black body is attached to it. Because our societies are centered on the idea of whiteness as default, everything else is viewed in contrast to that. Black bodies become synonymous with crime, disorder, and misconduct and black spaces and the wombs of black mothers become breeding grounds for future criminals and murderers, regardless of the socioeconomic makeup or prestige of the area that they're from. Cacho's point on "[transparent recognition]" is just as powerful because it solidifies the idea that black bodies embody a naturally-occurring self-destructive way of being.⁷⁴ So Lupe's proclamation of being "from the ghetto" or his observation of "ghetto girls [and] ghetto sons," or even the minimization of black music into "ghetto bass" and "ghetto drums," becomes an observation from the eyes of white bodies, through the eyes of black bodies;⁷⁵ this surrogate relationship allows for white (or state) control of the "ghetto" without ever needing to step foot in it.

*"The pizza man don't come here no more
Deliver, deliver, deliver."*⁷⁶
Lupe Fiasco

So Lupe asks for more; he asks for deliverance, or to be set free. In this is a recognition that being considered a person isn't something that "ghetto" residents can do on their own, as 'living [is] something to be achieved and not experienced'⁷⁷ for these "[naturally alienized]"⁷⁸ individuals who, just by the very nature of "the sin"⁷⁹ of being birthed into and by a black ("ghetto") body, are "[ineligible] for personhood"⁸⁰ by default. Attempts at assimilation become futile, and these socially-dead persons attempting to prove their worthiness by practicing behaviors, creating guises, having names, telling stories, and living in areas in which white bodies can assume safety and communion end up pursuing work with no returns. Even black bodies who are able to ascend are still barred from fully realizing a white way of life. To ask for deliverance – and the "[sacredness of humanity]"⁸¹ – by pizza men and the broader society is to ask to be granted enough personhood to not only

be able to order and get delivered a pizza in the comfort of a “ghetto” home, but also to be able to realize the agency that comes with humanity, despite how disempowering this ask may seem.

However, freedom, in this context, is not just about being set free. It’s also about the systems and the people who run them taking responsibility for their actions and being held accountable for what they’ve done to stunt the growth of Chicago’s predominately-black neighborhoods. Since the Great Migration, white people, both inside and outside formal power structures, have inflicted violence through a variety of means (e.g. white flight, housing discrimination, unequal educational resource distribution) that have worked to perpetuate a cycle of black poverty and white social dominance in the South and West sides. But this inflicted violence doesn’t just exist in a social form; as Saba’s “LIFE” describes, these sentiments of cyclic black subordination play themselves out through physical means as well.

“A lot of shit in other people’s lives that I think if anybody else wrote this song, it

could have the same structure, the same format, and they can just change the moments, the chronological parts, they can just swipe it out, put whatever they want through there. And I think that’s what a lot of people do in how they relate to it. ‘Cause they listen to it from their own life instead of mine, you know?’”

*Saba*⁸²

In February 2017, Saba lost his cousin Walter Long, Jr. to a fatal stabbing during a fight after getting off of a train in the Fulton Market district on Chicago’s West side. Long, a fellow member and cofounder of the Chicago hip hop collective Pivot Gang (currently made up of Saba, Joseph Chilliams, MFN Melo, SqueakPIVOT, Dam Dam, Frsh Waters, daedaePIVOT, and Daoud), and Saba were as close as brothers, and Long’s sudden death took a toll on the group of artists and friends. A little over a year later came Saba’s second album *Care for Me*, an album whose songs, including “LIFE,” act as both a memorial for Walter and a way to stop Saba from “runnin’ away”⁸³ from the reality of his emotions and his cousin’s passing. His songs reminiscing about childhood and

summers in “sweet West side Chicago”⁸⁴ are blanketed between confessions of guilt, past infidelity, loneliness, anger, and depression. Along with his personal reflections, Saba also talks about the multitude of ways that black ghettoized bodies suffer and are taken away from each other by each other, themselves, and the state.

“I tell Death to keep a distance, I think he obsessed with me.”

*Saba*⁸⁵

85,752 people were arrested in Chicago in 2017, 73.81% of the bodies arrested were black predominately-male bodies, who were predominately between the ages of 22 and 30 and arrested on drug-related charges.⁸⁶ One of those 85,752 bodies was the murderer of Saba’s cousin Walter, another black male body between the ages of 22 and 30. “LIFE” finds Saba trying to reckon both with the death of his cousin and the incarceration of another young black man as a result. He recognizes the state’s pursuit of the chance to “auction off [black] kids” fitted with barcodes on their wrists “that don’t fit their description of a utopia,” while also mourning the life of

a loved one.⁸⁷ Both situations involve the removal of black sons from the rest of their community. In her book *In the Wake*, Christina Sharpe, scholar of English literature and Black Studies, talks about the lack of agency that black people tend to have in their deaths. Often, black bodies suffer unnatural deaths at the hands of other people for simply existing; it’s almost common knowledge, Sharpe explains, amongst black people that “[they] can be killed for [no other offense but] simply being black.”⁸⁸

Young black men, like the ones living on the South and West sides of Chicago, are a part of the largest prison populations and serving the longest prison sentences in the nation. For Illinois as a whole, black people who were incarcerated before the age of 25 (who are predominately-male) make up 67.6% of the populations in prisons that are serving the longest sentences, and 28.4% of the total incarcerated population in Illinois are black, under 25 at the time of incarceration, and serving sentences that are 10 years or

more.⁸⁹ By taking death at its most basic definition, the removal of an individual's physical body from society, these young black men are being sent to these non-societal spaces to die, often both metaphorically and in reality. In exchange for the "[auctioned]"⁹⁰ black body of these black men and boys, the broader community is supposedly receiving a peace of mind, guaranteed safety, and the ability to walk around the South and West sides of Chicago without needing to ask Google whether or not "the South side of Chicago [is] safe."⁹¹ And this lack of agency continues for black men and boys who are able to exist beyond prison cells; threats of police violence and violence from other black men and boys still exist. In 2014, Laquan Macdonald was murdered by Chicago Police officer Jason Van Dyke, after Van Dyke fired 16 shots at McDonald in the span of 15 seconds. 3 years later, Walter was allegedly murdered at the hand of Kevin Alexander, a 23 year old Chicago black man. In between and after both of these events, black men and boys have continued to have run ins with each other, the police, and other forms of death-bringing that make the ability for a natural death an impossible one.

An important point that Saba makes in this song, and in the album as a whole, is how black bodies are conditioned to work towards self-removal. It isn't as explored in the song as the extrapersonal deaths, but he touches on the role that addiction can play in aiding that mortality. Black bodies can't exist as black people if society doesn't recognize them as such, but they also can't exist if they don't recognize themselves as such. The depletion of the black body, both physical ("Momma mixed the vodka with the Sprite") and mental ("I still go to social functions even though I'm so anti"), work in tangent with the work that is done more broadly by the state.⁹²

Living in an environment of constant sociopolitical, economic, and racial stress and neglect is a condition that calls for a coping mechanism. Black folk living in Chicago experience "mood and depressive disorder hospitalizations" 22.1% more than the population of Chicago as a whole, "behavioral health hospitalizations" 102.5% more than the population of Chicago as a whole, and "schizophrenic disorder hospitalizations" 45% more than the population of Chicago as a whole, while

experiencing “drug overdose deaths” that are 14.2% higher than the population of Chicago as a whole.⁹³ And this is all happening in areas that have limited access to mental health resources and mental health conversations. The deaths from or use of drugs or alcohol aren’t statistically directly related to the mental health of black folk living in Chicago’s South and West sides, but Saba makes connections in his life and the lives of the people in his community between what they experience, what they feel, and how they cope.

In the final iteration of the hook, Saba addresses the normalization of black pain in two simple words: “that’s life.”⁹⁴ Everything that he mentions in the song up until that point relating to his personal pain and the collective pain of black bodies in his community and in the nation get characterized as something that black bodies are destined to go through. We’re destined to experience loss at a young age; we’re expected to be lost at a young age. We’re destined to experience addiction, depression, and a yearning for “happier days.”⁹⁵ As social media continues its prevalence in our lives, the “rapid, deliberate, repetitive, and

wide circulation on television and social media of Black social, material, [psychic, and physical] death” runs the risk of causing our desensitization to the suffering of black bodies, even if the intent is to do the opposite.⁹⁶ Both Saba and Lupe Fiasco bring that potential for desensitization to the forefront of their songs and they use them as opportunities to remind us that the suffering of black people isn’t something natural. It’s something that’s a result of a conscious process on behalf of a predominately-white society that is run off of the destabilization, suffering, and death of communities of color.

In the continuation of the effort to denaturalize the view of black suffering, the next chapter explores the importance of black joy and happiness to the sustaining of life in black life in general, and predominately-black areas of Chicago in particular. While the presentation of a chapter on black joy can seem oppositional to the claims made in this chapter, I believe that in order for us to explore black Chicago more extensively, we have to be willing to look at the whole of black life, which involves taking time to acknowledge the


importance of laughter and black exuberance. This creates a somewhat more balanced story that relies less on negative aspects of black experience and more on the more positive ones.



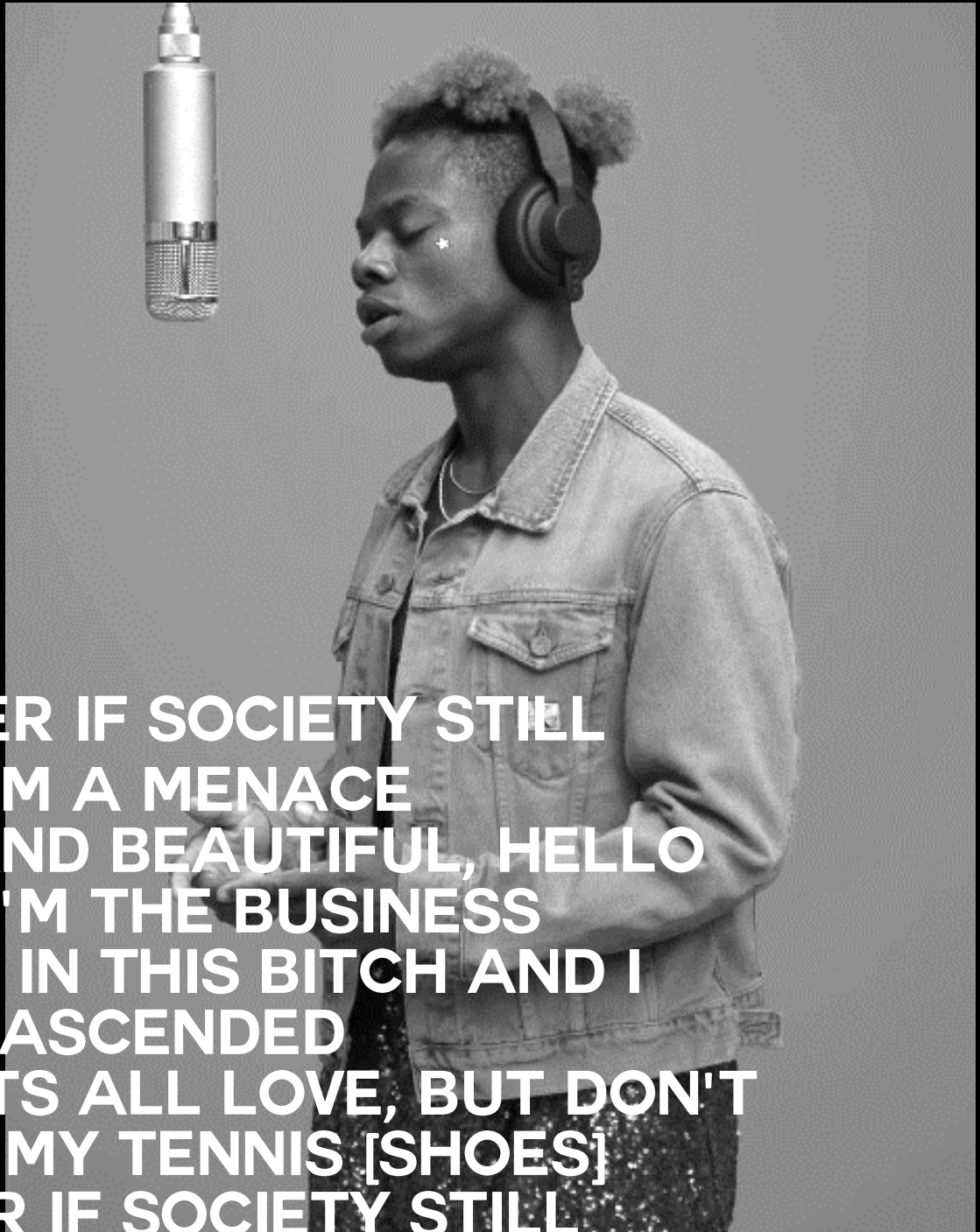
Still from "Deliver" by Lupe Fiasco



Still from "LIFE" by Saba



**"I SPEAK OF PROMISED LANDS
SOIL AS SOFT AS MOMMA'S
HANDS
RUNNING WATER, STANDING
STILL
ENDLESS FIELDS OF DAFFODILS
AND CHAMOMILE
RICE UNDER BLACK BEANS
WALKED INTO APPLE WITH
CRACKED SCREENS
AND TOLD PROPHETIC STORIES
OF FREEDOM
FOUND WARMTH IN A BLACK
QUEEN FOR WHEN I GET COLD
LIKE NAT KING, I'M DOING THE
DAD THING."⁹⁷**



**"I WONDER IF SOCIETY STILL
THINKS I'M A MENACE
BLACK AND BEAUTIFUL, HELLO
WORLD, I'M THE BUSINESS
STEPPED IN THIS BITCH AND I
SWEAR I ASCENDED
I KNOW ITS ALL LOVE, BUT DON'T
STEP ON MY TENNIS [SHOES]
I WONDER IF SOCIETY STILL
THINKS I'M A MENACE
BLACK AND BEAUTIFUL, HELLO
WORLD, I'M THE BUSINESS
STEPPED IN THIS BITCH AND I
SWEAR I ASCENDED
I KNOW ITS ALL LOVE, BUT DON'T
STEP ON MY TENNIS [SHOES]."**⁹⁸

CHAPTER FIVE: RADICAL URBAN BLACK HAPPINESS

'Part of showing your presence is keeping your ability to laugh. Laughing is a defensive mechanism. You are laughing, chatting, joking, so that you can continue to be like a human being. When you become totally pessimistic, you are really saying, "I am ready to die, I don't want to live anymore." You dehumanize yourself. Humor [and joy] is essential to be able to stand up and stay steadfast. It's part of saying: 'I am here and nobody can deny my presence here'.'

Adnan Musallam²⁵

2012 offered up a chance at a renewed national attention on black physical and social death, similar to the one that was sparked during the 1960s with the Civil Rights Movement. After the murder of Trayvon Martin in Sanford, Florida, in 2012 and the subsequent acquittal of his murderer George Zimmerman in 2013, discourse on physical black pain worked its way into daily life, with discourse on social black pain finding its roots afterwards. Not only where these discussions sparked, but there has also been a spark in visual

representations of black suffering.

Cellphone videos of unarmed black people losing their lives to police and black bodies being brutalized in clashes between Black Lives Matter demonstrators and alleged white nationalists have graced our phones seemingly every week since Martin's death. Along with this, popular media has been following a similar path with movies like Ryan Coogler's *Fruitvale Station* (2013), Jordan Peele's *Get Out* (2017), Kathryn Bigelow's *Detroit* (2017), and George Tillman Jr.'s *The Hate U Give* (2018) transferring social media conversations on police brutality and white dehumanization of black bodies onto the big screen, a project that is in no way a new one, but one that seems even more salient as the lines between fiction and reality continue to blur.

With the blurring of those lines, there's a risk of us beginning to associate black suffering and pain with normality and the exhibition of black pain and death as forms of entertainment, and without an intervention that proves otherwise, it's hard, even for people who exist in black bodies, to

imagine an alternate way of living, especially in places like the South and West sides of Chicago. So, it becomes important for us to put a spotlight on moments of black joy, not only as a way to deemphasize the role of suffering in black life, but also to present black happiness as radical resistance and a sign of resilience. Chance the Rapper's "Angels" and Tobi Lou's "Solange" are examples of how artists from Chicago are working to bring nuance to how we think of blackness and black experience, by not denying the existence of black pain, but by proving the existence of happiness in urban black life.

Having grown up in the South side neighborhood of West Chatham, Chancelor Bennett entered mainstream consciousness as Chance the Rapper in the aftermath of the release of his mixtape *Acid Rap* in 2013. Dubbing himself "Kanye [West]'s best prodigy,"²⁶ Chance takes a page out of West's book on gospel rap, fusing Kirk Franklin features and Fred Hammond interpolations with hip hop production. In the years leading up to the release of *Coloring Book*, he established himself as the "feel good rapper" who was able to make a

name for himself without the use of record label influence, and as an outspoken artist with well-established Chicago roots and parental involvement in city politics, he quickly became the voice for the black Chicago experience. He holds the media accountable for their selective representation of black distress and questions why more money is getting put towards the recruitment of new Chicago Police officers, rather than into the Chicago Public School system, and he brings that same energy into his debut album *Coloring Book* in 2016.

In the album's 14 tracks, Chance reflects on the often polarized childhood that he had growing up in West Chatham, as well as the ups and downs that have filled his life post-*Acid Rap*. In his song "Summer Friends," he simultaneously reminisces about summers spent "catchin' lightnin' bugs" and "ice cream trucks" with the boys in his neighborhood, while also remembering that a lot of those same boys are just a summer memory, having been lost to the gang violence, gun violence, and police violence. His song "Finish Line / Drown" is a song about allowing space for hope to exist in our everyday lives, while it

also leaves room for Chance to reflect on a past drug addiction that almost ruins his career. While “Angels” does similar work of presenting the dichotomy of life in Chicago, as it is partly a memorial for “young angels” who have lost their lives due to violence on the South side, the song and accompanying music video are primarily filled with moments of optimism and joy that Chance and featured artist Saba share as they reflect on the love that they have for Chicago.²⁷

In the song’s three and a half minutes, Chance’s verses and Saba’s hooks take turns introducing the listener to Chicago lingo, juking and footwork, and WGCI-FM and Power 92.3, two of Chicago’s hip hop stations. Chance also takes time to show love to fellow Chicago hip hop artist Chief Keef, whose music is both considered to be the antithesis to Chance’s and an important part of bringing Chicago’s hip hop community to the mainstream. The music video for the song features Chance the Rapper flying above the streets of Chicago – and riding on top of a city train – dressed as “Flyboy,” the main character in many works by Chicago artist

Hebru Brantley in 2016. Flyboy, Brantley explains, came out of an observation of the lack of cartoon characters of color.²⁸ Though Brantley’s Flyboy isn’t a direct attempt to create a character for children, the Tuskegee Airmen-inspired character works to remind children of color in Chicago, particularly the city’s black youth population, that they have the ability to dream and reach those dreams.²⁹ And while Chance the Rapper wears a “3”-adorned hat as a part of his everyday uniform instead of an aviator hat and goggles like Flyboy, he and Saba are real life Flyboys, working through their music and various community organizations to create and sustain a healthy and happy Chicago. Along with the music, Chance founded a community organization called Social Works that has been dedicated to empowering Chicago’s youth through “arts, education, and civic engagement,”³⁰ while Saba’s work with the John Walt Foundation, created after the death of his late cousin Walter Long Jr., has also been “focused on mentorship, collaborative and experiential learning” of young Chicago artists.³¹ As both of these organizations work to inspire and energize the artistry within Chicago’s

youth population, they also play a pivotal proactive role in establishing a sense of hope and optimism in their community, allowing for both the young artists and the community around them to look towards a brighter, and more tangible future.

While Tobi Lou has not yet garnered the same level of mainstream success as Chance the Rapper and Saba, he, too, is doing his part to provide a narrative coming out of Chicago that's bright and full of color. Born in Nigeria and moving to Chicago with his family at aged two, Tobi Lou grew up playing baseball, with his mind set on becoming a professional baseball player as an adult. However, after an injury took him out of the game, with a push from his mother, Tobi decided to take the opportunity to pursue his musical career.³² Like Chance, Tobi was inspired by Kanye West to make music, citing West's individuality and uniqueness as motivation. After releasing a few singles between 2015 and 2017, Tobi released his first multi-song project, *Tobi Lou and the Moon*, in 2018. Though the project has only a total of three songs, it works to solidify Tobi Lou as an artist that can wear a multitude of musical

hats. In his songs "Lounar" and "Sailor," he presents stories of love that didn't have time to blossom, unattainable relationships with close friends, and his dislike for current national politics and politicians, both songs presenting a variety of sounds ranging from dream pop to trap-inspired instrumentals. In "Solange" – from the same project – and its accompanying video, while reflecting on unrequited love, Tobi presents a carefree attitude that's dressed in a cheetah print robe, pink shorts, and a black shirt that promises that Tobi is "working on [his next] album."³³ As he dances around changing multicolored, anime-inspired backgrounds with stars stickered to the apples of his cheeks, Tobi boasts about how he's now the boss of his own life, not letting his heartbreak or anyone else's opinions, namely those of police who think he's "too black for their likin'" or the "You" that "broke [his] heart last summer," get in the way of him pursuing his dreams and taking charge of his own future.³⁴

These two songs, among many things, are built around their exploration into the black private sphere, something that black people often aren't granted the

permission to exist within. In *The Sovereignty of Quiet*, Kevin Quashie, scholar of African American studies, presents the idea of a black private sphere through his discourse on black interiority. Quashie describes the interior or interiority as “the source of human action...the range of desires and capacities of our inner life.”³⁵ He makes this point by digging deeper into W.E.B. du Bois’s theory of double consciousness. He explains that du Bois’s “notion of double consciousness does not characterize the inner life of the black subject, at least not an interior that has its own sovereignty...du Bois does not offer a description of the black subject as having access to his selfhood.”³⁶ As a result, blackness is viewed as being acted out on a stage, both the center of attention and the center of speculation. The audience doesn’t know what happens backstage or when the show is over, and few ever inquire more into it, and by extension, that backstage life – or the private sphere – turns into something that doesn’t exist.

He uses the example of Tommie Smith and John Carlos’s black power salute at a 1968 Olympic medal ceremony as an

exploration into this. After winning first and third place, respectively, during the 200 meter race at the 1968 Olympics, Smith and Carlos raised black-gloved fists reminiscent of the black power salute, while standing on the winning podium as the “Star Spangled Banner” played in the background of this historic moment. Quashie uses this example to describe an act of “intimacy [and] deep spirituality” that gets turned into one of “public expressiveness” and “public assertiveness,” without any consideration of the personal and private that this moment is made of.³⁷ Instead of the moment being about Smith and Carlos’s own intentions, their intentions are forced onto them in order for the outside world to make sense of their actions. This lack of care for the interior becomes almost exclusively how we see blackness and black people, and that same lack of focus on the interior plays itself out in the theory of double consciousness. This is not to say that moments like Smith and Carlos’s are completely devoid of the sociopolitical and racial forces that come from the public sphere, though. Of course living in a world steep in racism, discrimination, classism, etc. has some intrapersonal consequences that get played

out in individual actions and behaviors. However moments like these do allow more room for us to consider what it could look like for black people to live lives that are self-determinate and self-meaningful, and Chance the Rapper and Tobi Lou do this work in their songs as well.

Another important point that these artists work to put an emphasis on the idea of happiness as resistance. While not downgrading the work that people do in more “take to the streets” activism, Chance the Rapper and Tobi Lou use their music to make activism more accessible. In communities like the South and West sides of Chicago where people are spending a significant amount of their time working and trying to provide for their families, there is often little extra time and energy to plan and execute marches and demonstrations. Although there are organizations, many of which are founded by black women like Page May’s Assata’s Daughters and Cathy Cohen’s Black Youth Project 100, that take on the burden of this work despite the amount of extra time it eats up, there are others who don’t have that same ability. There are also people for whom marches and demonstrations don’t fulfill the need for community involvement. Whether it’s an

issue of physical ability or otherwise, “take to the streets” activism isn’t always built to accommodate everybody, often reflecting the issues of patriarchy and ableism that we have in our society, so despite the work of inclusion that it attempts to do, by design, it can sometimes be exclusionary.

Emphasizing day to day activities as forms of resistance and resilience brings activism into a more tangible view, where people don’t have to feel like they have to be experts in anything other than their own experiences, in order to participate, especially with social media’s influence.

Social media, while helpful in worldwide engagement, can sometimes bring on a feeling of needing to know everything that’s happening in the world. Because the news is in the palm of our hands, it’s hard for us to make excuses for people who seem to not know enough about what’s happening in our communities. As a result, people who don’t have that same access to information, or don’t necessarily fully understand issues like police brutality and sexual misconduct, can feel guilty about not knowing “as much” as everyone else on a topic, even if they’re a part of the affected community. What can be helpful for these individuals, though, is knowing that the

small acts of living life can be just as impactful as traditional forms of resistance, and we have to do the work of lifting up those forms of resilience as means of working towards the same ends.

“Winter in Chicago is terrible. No one really goes outside, and if you're outside, everyone's just battling the elements. So you don't really see smiles or anything. Then I came to LA in February and it was bright as fuck. I was walking around and it felt so different. Of course it was sunny, but I just realized everyone was smiling, too. I was like, “What the fuck?” Then I figured out, oh, that's because they don't have to battle zero degree weather...I was couch surfing at a friends' house, so it was still tough, but when the sun comes up, it makes you feel like you have a chance. I feel like that made me start in my little quote-unquote “happy shit” Tobi Lou stuff.”³⁸

In an interview with Complex in 2018, Tobi Lou describes his move to Los Angeles as a part of his artistic coming of age. While answering a question on what attracts him to “positive music” and why he

decides to make it, Tobi details his experiences living in LA and how they shaped him musically.³⁹ He describes the impact that his environment has on his music, and blames “winter in Chicago” for the lack of joy in Chicago, and for black Chicagoans, winter can be many things.⁴⁰ Whether they’re battling the elements of racism and discrimination or bracing the cold of exclusion and social abandonment, black Chicagoans are forced to brave many storms just to survive, and those storms take such a toll that people begin to associate their own lives with endless struggle, rather than moments of ups and downs, and it’s in this characterization that people begin to give up. There is no more “[reaching] for the stars” to allow for “[landing] on a cloud” if you fall; there’s only the fear of falling or the fear that you’ve already fallen so much that there’s no way to get back up.⁴¹

Across the world, in their own fight for liberation, Palestinians have centered the idea of sumud, the Arabic word for “steadfastness,” as an emphasizing of “the ‘small’ contributions of people’s resistance to occupation in daily life.”⁴² Sumud

encompasses anything from preserving the names and memories associated with neighborhoods and traditional Palestinian culture to rebuilding houses that were destroyed and laughing with friends. The idea of sumud works to preserve national identity, communicate Palestinian existence and humanity to non-Palestinians, and helps sustain Palestinian community ties, and even though sumud is described as being a “uniquely Palestinian tactic,” there are aspects of sumud that are helpful to think about in a black American, and specifically black Chicagoan, context.⁴³ Within sumud, there is room to reach for the stars without fear of falling because there’s an understanding that the only ones who can let you fall are you and your community. As long as hope and perseverance are alive and well, a reason for keeping on is always there. And while easier said than done, resistance and resilience have been part of the black American (and black Chicagoan)

story from the beginning, and every time we’ve fallen, “still [we] rise,” and these moments of ascendance are completely made up of our optimism, joy, elation, and hope, lifting us up until we land in the clouds.⁴⁴

The next chapter further explores the importance of the everyday work of black survival in Chicago, by focusing on the lesser-told story of black Chicago women. While the current and former chapters may seem to present a comprehensive view of black Chicago happenings, they lack crucial conversations on the role that black women in Chicago – and in hip hop more generally – have made to sustain the black experience. By bringing in the theoretical frameworks and intersectional nature of black feminism, the next chapter hopes to fill in some of the gaps that have been left by the current and former chapters.







**“THEY SOLD PRISON THE WAY
THEY PIPELINE,
SYSTEMATICALLY LIFELINE
ERASE ALL NIGGAS, THEY SO
BULLETPROOF FROM THE LAW
LAW ABIDING CITIZEN SHOT,
WILLIE LYNCH DO CRACK NOW
MADE THE NEW LETTERS SHINY,
NOW WE PRAY KING KUNTA
I HOPE THE GRAVE DON'T FIND
ME, I DO MY E& KINDLY
I DO MY TIME WHEN IT'S TIMELY
SOMETIMES THE BIBLE TASTES
LIKE MARMALADE
MY MOMMA STILL SIPPING.”¹¹⁹**

CHAPTER SIX: NONAME AND LIMITATIONS OF NARRATIVE

The lack of attention on – and lack of broader demand for – the black female voice has been commonplace in American history since the beginning of Western colonization. Along with the dehumanization efforts of black bodies that went into the incorporation of systemic racism beginning during chattel slavery, black women face(d) a double blow as race and gender collide(d). Their bodies and experiences began to be used as supportive roles, ones that involved a level of submissiveness and subjection towards both white and black men, leaving room for nothing in the form of self-determination. Because of this, black women and their contributions are minimized to a point of nonexistence, with the work that they have done and continue to do going virtually unnoticed. And this invisibility exists into contemporary American society and extends into the contemporary American narratives that are told through hip hop music today.

In the years following the implementation of chattel slavery in the United States, the stories of black women that were told, were for the benefit of ending chattel slavery, instead of being for the

benefit of expanded vocalization of the black female narratives. Most of the time, these stories fit into the tragic mulatta genre, a subsection of abolitionist-targeted narratives that bring attention to the plight of biracial black women by garnering sympathy from white women. Works in this genre include Nella Larsen's *Passing*, William Wells Brown's *Clotel*, and Charles W. Chesnutt's *The House Behind the Cedars*. These narratives aligned their "tragic mulatta" protagonists with the characteristics necessary to grant them entry into the Cult of Domesticity (or the Cult of True Womanhood), an ideological basis for the supposed piety, submissiveness, and domesticity of (white, upper-class, American) women. By pushing these "tragic mulattas" closer to white femininity, the white, upper-class, wives of slave owners, who made up the majority of the audience for abolitionist literature, would be moved to tears and to the direct action of working towards the abolition of chattel slavery. Outside of these narratives, black women voices were barely given an opportunity for prioritization, even though black women played an essential role in the maintenance

of the social standing of white Americans and the maintenance of the black American family by performing caretaking and domestic work and servitude in both.

For the black male hip hop artists included in this thesis so far, black women have also played an essential role in the lives that they live and the stories they tell. References to Saba's grandmother take a front seat in his song "SMILE," and in both his video for "LIFE" and his video for "SIRENS," little black girls, black mother figures, and black sister figures stand beside him in his telling of stories about police violence and the loss of time. Chance the Rapper's "Sunday Candy" is an ode to his grandmother, who influenced both his religion and his love for gospel music, as he sat with her in church pews during Sunday morning worship services as a child. Lupe Fiasco's sister Ayesha Jaco is the first voice that's heard on his 2006 album *Lupe Fiasco's Food and Liquor* (which is dedicated to their grandmother), 2007 album *Lupe Fiasco's The Cool*, and 2012 album *Food & Liquor II: The Great American Rap Album*. She also makes an appearance as the bridge that listeners cross to get from one part of the song to the next in "Prisoner 1 & 2" on his 2015 album *Tetsuo & Youth*, while

Fiasco makes several references to his mother and grandmother on songs like "Fighters" from *The Cool*.

These artists, as hip hop artists as a whole have, not only make references to the black women in their lives in their music and music videos, but they also make extensive use of black women (and other women of color) as featured artists in their. Black women artists like Eryn Allan Kane, Akenya, Ravyn Lenae, and Jean Deaux are frequent collaborators on the songs of Chicago hip hop's up and coming male artists. Oftentimes, their vocals are seated within the hooks and choruses of these songs, their voices blending well with the jazz-influenced instrumentation that many of the artists make use of, while the men take the lead on the verses.

This relegation to the rank of featured artist is how mainstream listeners were introduced to Noname in 2013. Known for the first couple of years of her career as some variation of "Chance the Rapper's frequent collaborator," after their collaboration on Chance's "Lost" from *Acid Rap*, Noname spent the first three years of her career as a featured artist alongside hip hop artists from inside and outside of

Chicago. Before getting into music, Noname started off as a poet and while going to and performing at open mikes, she met artists like Chance the Rapper and Mick Jenkins who encouraged her to start rapping. Using her work with poetry and spoken word, Noname was able to find her rap voice during freestyle rap sessions with her friends, and from there, used it to support the musical creations of the Chicago artists that were starting to get national attention in the early 2010s.

Her mixtape *Telefone*, released in 2016, acts as mainstream's first introduction to Noname at centerstage. Though, at that point in her career, she was still shying away from the publicness of interviews and music videos, *Telefone* was Noname's opening up more in terms of musical outreach. It was also an affirmation for her, while deciding on whether or not to quit rapping and pursue a possible nursing degree, to continue rapping, as the reception was overwhelmingly positive. In it, she matches the nostalgia, exploration into the life of black twentysomethings, and conversations about the black racial condition that Saba's *The Bucket List Project*, the precursor to

Care for Me, and Chance the Rapper's *Coloring Book* also engage in the same year. In her song "Casket Pretty" from the same mixtape, Noname continues the theme of mortality that she reflects on in other songs from the mixtape's ten-song tracklist, this song focusing on the impact of police brutality and violence done onto black bodies by police officers.

The listener is introduced to the beginning of the song with a baby's giggle used as a sample throughout the song's duration. In stark contrast to the sample are her lyrics reflecting on wishes for the black men in her life to make it home instead of her "tele[phone]...ring[ing]" to announce a premature death and her fear of "the blue and the white" of police cars and uniforms.¹²⁰ The juxtaposition of the lyrics and the baby's giggle underline her lyrics of their being "too many babies in suits" and caskets.¹²¹

*"And I'm afraid of the dark, blue and the white
Badges and pistols rejoice in the night
And we watch the news, and we see him die tonight*

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*Tonight the night his baby said goodbye
Roses in the road, teddy bear outside, bullet
there on the right
Where's love when you need it?
Too many babies in suits.”
Noname, “Casket Pretty”¹²²*

As detailed as this song is with exploring the multitude of emotions that families feel when attempting to raise and protect their black sons, fathers, and uncles, the song misses a critical point of addressing the deaths of black women and girls by police and the impact that those deaths have on their communities. When black women and girls are taken away from their communities or are hurt due to racial violence, their families and friends grieve just as they would if they were men or boys. This impact only worsens with the inclusion of gender and sexual violence that black women and girls are subjected to from inside and outside the black community.

Two years after the release of *Telefone*, Noname dropped her debut album *Room 25*, along with the video for her song “Blaxploitation,” a callback, both in instrumentation and lyric, to the 1970s film genre of the same name. Though she spends

the first half of the second verse bringing light to historical and contemporary stereotypes of black women, reflecting on the “mammy...naked bitch in [music videos and] drunk club lady” archetypes of black women that exist prominently in art and media, that work gets lost in the visuals for the song.¹²³ The music video for “Blaxploitation” includes a miniature version of the city of Chicago “under siege” by a so called “monster baby,” a Godzilla-like attack that is being televised into the homes of terror-stricken white families.¹²⁴

*“So the video is basically kind of like in the style of Godzilla. But instead of there being this huge obscene creature terrorizing a town, it's this little baby and he's going around and he's destroying the city. But it's showing like a take on how I think white America sometimes views black people, almost as this unrealistic fear of black people or people of color — what you don't know. But then, by the end of it, it pulls out and it shows it's just a baby in a playground.”
Noname¹²⁵*

The “monster baby” played by Tremarri Limbrick, a little black boy no older than 5 years old at the making of the video, wanders curiously around the miniaturized Chicago until being captured by, and subsequently escaping from, a woven net.¹²⁶ During the spring and summer of 2018, numerous videos emerged on social media showing white women in the midst of calling the police on a black person living and breathing in a public area. While barbecuing in an Oakland park like Kenzie Smith, selling water on a San Francisco sidewalk like eight year old Jordan Rodgers, or walking around a cornerstore in Brooklyn like nine year old Jeremiah Harvey, black folx, including black children, all over the United States were being questioned for simply being black in public. Colloquially known as “BBQ Becky[s], Permit Patty[s] and Cornerstore Caroline[s],”¹²⁷ these monikers reflect the seriousness and the absurdity of being punished for being black, the criminalization of black children, and the infantilization of black adults, and the video for “Blaxploitation” speaks to all three. It also, like issues of redlining and fair housing in the 1960s, touches on the inability for black bodies to move freely about spaces

and the automatic association of black bodies with danger. However, again, though this song and the music video that accompanies it are full of racial and sociopolitical discourses, the imagery in the video misses out on an opportunity to show the struggles that black women and girls have faced by casting a little black boy in the starring role.

Noname occupies both a genre and a racial position where the stories and experiences of black women and girls get left out of the picture all too often. And even though she doesn’t have the responsibility to always include those narratives in her music, these two songs show the gap that still exists in conversations around the racial violence that black people as a whole, and black women in particular, face. This invisibility can happen even when the storyteller is both black and a woman. As a result, the face of racial violence and discrimination against black bodies ends up looking like Trayvon Martin and Laquan McDonald, instead of Rekia Boyd, the 22-year-old woman who was shot in the head by an off-duty police officer in a Chicago alley in 2012, and Aiyana Stanley-Jones, the seven-year-old

who was killed during a police raid in her home in Detroit in 2010. According to a brief, released by the African American Policy Forum, “an innovative [social justice] think tank,”¹²⁸ black men and black women have about the same chance of being stopped by the police, with black men making up 55.7% of the men stopped by police, and black women making up 53.4% of the women stopped by police.¹²⁹ The brief was released as a response to the lack of coverage, accountability, and awareness surrounding the deaths of and violence done to black women and girls. Even Noname’s positionality as one of the only mainstream black female hip hop artists coming out of Chicago, outside of Cupcakke and Da Brat, in a slew of new artists who call Chicago their homes, speaks volumes to the invisibility of black women in broader black racial discourse.

And this brings an important question into play: if black women aren’t able to tell their stories, then who is? From what I’ve seen of the black women in my personal life, both in familial and friend groups, it is almost second-nature for a black woman to spend much of her time taking

care of and uplifting other people that she forgets to include opportunities for her to uplift herself and magnify her own story. They’re caretakers and daycare runners, community chefs and hair stylists, and advice givers and counselors, all on top of their normal 9 to 5s. They put themselves above others, without asking for or reaping any award, and a lot of these women continue to do this work, even when their own communities have done violence onto their bodies. But when someone else chooses to tell her story, does this use of surrogacy of voice do the same work that it would do if she told her own story? The plight and invisibility of black women hasn’t gone completely unnoticed by communities outside of themselves, so many artists, including Chance the Rapper, Saba, and Lupe Fiasco (who has made extensive use of black female narratives in his songs), use their positionality to bring forward the stories of black women in an act of solidarity.

An example of this surrogacy of voice is in Lupe Fiasco’s song “He Say She Say,” a song that explores the complicated relationship between a son and his father,

through the eyes of a single mother and her son. The two verses in the song are the same, except for the first couple of lines in each that let the listener know whether the verse is from the perspective of the mother or the son. The verse that's in the voice of the single mother reflects the trouble of trying to provide for her family and raise a son with "no positive male role model."¹³⁰ The song is powerful in its own right, providing a glimpse, though fictionalized, into a single family household, where a mother and son are struggling with the neglect of a father and former partner.

The moments that "He Say She Say" focuses on aren't glamorized; they are problems that households and mothers, all over the South and West sides of Chicago face in their daily lives. However, it isn't a black woman telling this story. And because it isn't a black woman telling this story, what could be a moment of solidarity and empathy, could turn into a moment of paternalism of black women by black men, even if the intentions are pure. It then becomes a matter of the body and experiences of black women being co-opted for the sake of making a profit, instead of it

being a moment where we can talk candidly and fully about the racial, gender, and class politics that surround the lives of (poor) black women. Instead of us knowing the names of those women, we know the names of the men who are choosing to tell their stories, as those men get held up as symbols of accountability, empathy, and shining allyship. And this can be especially hurtful if they aren't also doing the work of creating opportunities for women to uplift themselves, both sonically and otherwise. The work of intentionality can only go so far.

So, it's important that we allow opportunities to explore the brilliance of these women that cuts out the middle man, and puts the spotlight on the ways that they support their communities. Black women all over the country, and in Chicago in particular, have been doing work that deserves recognition. According to Data USA, women between the ages of 25-34 made up the most impoverished group in Chicago in 2016, while black Chicagoans are facing the highest poverty rates.¹³¹ As a result, the individuals that make up the largest percentage of low-income

Chicagoans end up being black women. This hasn't stopped them, and black women all over the country, from using what little free time they have between raising families and working, to fight for racial, gender, and class equality regionally and nationally.

Two of the most influential movements of the decade, the Black Lives Matter Movement, founded by Alicia Garza, Patrisse Cullors, and Opal Tometi, and the #MeToo Movement, founded by Tarana Burke, were created by working-class black (queer) women and have worked to spark and continue national conversations surrounding race and gender politics. On a more local level, black female activists have been busy sparking sociopolitical and racial discourses in the city of Chicago that are based on queer feminist theoretical frameworks. Chicago-based groups founded and maintained by black women like Assata's Daughters, founded by Page May and dedicated to "[addressing the] shortage in programming and community for women identified young Black people in Chicago,"¹³² and Black Youth Project 100 (BYP100), founded by Cathy Cohen and dedicated to "creating justice and freedom

for all Black people,"¹³³ credit the missions and values of their groups on black queer feminist theory from authors and activists like bell hooks, Audre Lorde, and Ella Baker.

BYP100's mission is centered around fighting for a "black queer feminist future" by using black queer feminism to "understand that there are a plethora of [interconnected] factors," like white supremacy, patriarchy, and capitalism, "that work together to spark [oppression]" that subsequently affects all people.¹³⁴ Project NIA, another black advocacy group based in Chicago that has been working primarily on decreasing the number of arrested, detained, and incarcerated youth in the city, was founded by Mariame Kaba, a black woman activist from Chicago who has held the eradication of silence and ignorance of violence against women (of color) at the center of her work for 30 years. And the work of black women has always been essential to national movements, just as it was during the 1950s and 1960s with the Black Panther Party and the Chicago Freedom Movement, and these women have been doing this work while simultaneously

trying to work and take care of their families.

So then the question becomes: what can we do to change the trajectory of our narratives about black experiences, in a way that centers and empowers black women? Part of this comes from the continuation of the work needed to be done to center the complexity of the black female experience. In an interview with NPR in February 2019, Noname expresses her hopes for a more inclusive mainstream image of femininity, especially black femininity. Though she's grateful women rappers like Cardi B have been able to make their marks in mainstream media, Noname recognizes that patriarchy works to perpetuate the singularity that can come with the branding, marketing, and view of black female rappers and their work by only allowing opportunities for women to be presented in one way. Oftentimes when a female artist like Noname presents herself in a way that's considered more conservative than another artist, that presentation is used as a way to pit the two artists against each other. There's an aspect of competition that gets put in place without either of the artists ever saying anything negative to each other,

a situation that seems to happen exclusively to (black) female artists.

Noname hopes that, instead, there can be an expansion of the "image of women"¹³⁵ to include a less monolithic view of how women should look and act, so instead of her music and representation of self being used antagonistically against another black woman's work, the two can be viewed as complements to one another. By extension, black women and girls have more chances to see themselves in the media and can feel more empowered to practice a "self-preservation"¹³⁶ that's centered on the creation of spaces for them to uplift their own stories, in order to unlearn the idea of putting others first and self-care and self-love perpetually on the backburner. Once black women and girls are able to see themselves and their stories as worthy of recognition, placing the duty of fully recognizing the humanity of black women and girls onto non-black woman individuals becomes easier. That self-recognition is able to assert itself with the backing of confidence and racial and gender pride. Another piece of this work can be done by following the leads of Chicago organizations

like B.Y.P.100, Project NIA, and Assata's Daughters that have decided to use black queer feminist theory to guide them and their work. The use of these traditions as a guiding point have made the work of supporting oppressed communities more nuanced, instead of looking at them as monolithic movements or moments. The Combahee River Collective, an organization of black lesbian feminist writers and scholars that was active in the mid-1970s through the 1980s, suggests that "if black women were free, it would mean that everyone else would have to be free since our freedom would necessitate the destruction of all systems of oppression,"

and that black women's liberation is everyone's liberation.¹³⁷ And in order for all black women to be free – including working-class and queer black women – sexism, racism, classism, homophobia, transphobia, and other modes of separation and control in the United States and globally need to be looked at more fully and engaged in in a way that works towards finding alternatives and possible solutions, and stories about the women at the helm of these movements need to become commonplace. That work takes coalition building in way of collaboration, accountability and reflection, empathy, and love between communities.



Stills from "Blaxploitation" by Noname



FEEL
LIKE
PABLO

CHAPTER SEVEN: CONCLUSION

“The truth is, if we don’t write our own stories, there is someone else waiting to do it for us. And those people, waiting with their pens, often don’t look like we do and don’t have our best interests in mind. With rap in the midst of what may become its greatest generational shift, geography has taken on a new importance. [These artists] are looking at gentrification as a generational issue, looking at place and seeing memories unfold that have to be archived somewhere...The demand is simple: no one gets to speak the name of my city without first knowing it as I have.”
Hanif Abdurraqib ¹³⁸

The idea for this thesis started off with hip hop’s connection to whiteness and, subsequently, its relationship to blackness. It was going to be an exploration into, what I was hoping to title as, *Why Are All the Black Kids Standing in the Back of the Hip Hop Concert*, an ode to Beverly Daniel Tatum’s *Why Are All the Black Kids Sitting Together in the Cafeteria*. To be honest, I’ve

never read the book before; I just liked the way the title sounded, and I wanted to put my own spin on it. It was going to be a conversation about cultural appropriation working hand in hand with suburbanization and white flight, classism, gender, and racism. The result was going to be my attempt at explaining why, when I went to see Tyler the Creator, Vince Staples, Chance the Rapper, or Kanye West, all of the black people were subjected to standing in the back, while the audience closest to the front of the stage was a predominately-white male one that sang lyrics that talked about black experiences as if those experiences were theirs. They sing references to “me and my niggas;”¹³⁹ they brag about “shaking down you niggas’ pockets”¹⁴⁰ and the blackness of their skin,¹⁴¹ and they do it in ways that make the unfamiliar seem familiar to them. It was going to be an attempt to understand how white-ownership of blackness and black bodies is a history that dates all the way back to chattel slavery, worked its way

into blackface minstrelsy, and found a new home in contemporary hip hop culture.

As I began to gather resources and help in the form of thesis advisors, one of the professors that I chose as an advisor offered me the advice of narrowing down the scope of my thesis. The goal could then become for me to pick a city, nationally or internationally, and talk about what hip hop is doing for the city; what is hip hop telling us about that city that we haven't heard before? My idea was good, but the scope of the project was a little too large for a 60-80 page paper. So, I chose Chicago; what better way for me to get to know the artists that shaped my musical journey throughout college than to write about the music and lives of the artists I've held so closely during the past three years?

Before starting this project, my knowledge about Chicago was minimal. I didn't know much about the South and West sides outside of what I had learned in school so far. I did, though, know that there had to be more to the story of Chicago than what was being both offered to me in an academic setting and outside of the classroom. Inside of the classroom, we were focusing on Chicago in a way that privileged the thoughts of people who didn't look like the

majority of South and West side residents. This mode of observation privileged the scholarship that was being done on Chicago, rather than putting a focus on lived experiences of black Chicagoans. This sterilization process didn't require these white academics to be held accountable for the way they were talking about Chicago and using black Chicagoans to study the effects of sociopolitical and racial factors that play out on black bodies. The city was the poster child for the black American city and urban black American life. Outside of the classroom, I was getting closer to the lived experiences of black Chicagoans, but it was happening in a way that still involved some level of stripping out information. The news that was breaking about Chicago was sensationalized; it told stories about crime rates and the crisis of black on black violence. That violence, in turn, was being used to justify the economic and social conditions of black folks in those areas. They were too violent, too unintelligent, too careless, too drunk/high, and too black to deserve financial or social empathy. So I decided to use this thesis as a way to get clarity for myself by prioritizing the voices of the people who live in those areas as experts of life in the South and West sides.

But even with that intentionality, I grappled with the nuances that writing this thesis presented to me that I wasn't really prepared for in the beginning. Though my intention has been to center the voices of Chance the Rapper, Lupe Fiasco, Saba, Noname, and others, talking about these artists and their works in an academic paper still runs the risk of me redoing the same work I have attempted to undo. There's academic language and reasoning that I've existed in for the past four years that, as an academic paper, this thesis is expected to engage in. I'm expected to mention intersectionality, social death, and suburbanization, in a way that utilizes the skills I'm expected to know by this point in my academic career, but this also places a level of privilege on this mode of academic understanding. The lyrical interpretation of the lyrics included in this thesis also run the risk of misrepresenting the intentions of the artist; because I have not been afforded the ability to interview these artists, I only have my own thoughts, soundbites of theirs from interviews or articles, and the analyses of people who have done this work before me. And to add the cherry on top: I'm not from Chicago.

So the question I've been asking myself throughout this thesis is: why do I think I have the ability to write a thesis like this? And honestly, it's a question that I haven't been able to answer completely, even as I write the conclusion to this work. But what I do know is that I'm a black woman who lives in Clayton County, Georgia – the city of Morrow, specifically – a space that is filled with low-income black Georgians, like myself, who have a story that's similar to the ones in the South and West sides of Chicago. A lot of the experiences that black people in my community – and in other misrepresented black spaces that me and my mom have called home over the past 22 years – reflect the same ones presented in the previous pages of this thesis, and that's true of black cities all over the United States. Lack of adequate housing, problems with employment, lack of funding for and segregation of schools, racial profiling, and social and physical death are all things that people in my community, and black communities more broadly, have to deal with.

When I hear Clayton County get talked about on the news when I'm at home, the news doesn't sound like my home. It

sounds like shootings and robberies, rather than the sound mosquitos and dragonflies buzzing past my head while we sit on our mismatched chairs in the backyard of our slice of the rented duplex we live in. This story gets replicated in black places and spaces all over the world; these spaces become less about the people in them and more about their relationship to the people outside of them. New Orleans becomes a city underwater; Port-au-Prince is both earthquake charity case and tourist destination; Chicago is split up into bad sides and good sides depending on how black it seems to be. So the story isn't completely transferrable, but it is a point of connection and solidarity for black folx, and while it doesn't give me complete authority to write this thesis and claim it as being any kind of complete story about black Chicago, it does allow me the opportunity to reflect on the connections between my home and the homes of my favorite artists, which have become more and more salient over the course of this work.

Kanye West and Late Registration's responsibility to a nine year old me wasn't to teach me about racism or the black experience in Chicago, at least not

explicitly. He's job ended up becoming an opportunity to show me how important black stories are and will continue to be. He was one of my first introductions to black storytelling and the art of orating black experiences, and over the 14 years since my musical coming of age, I've continued to be obsessed with the experience of creating, listening to, and engaging in black narrative, and it's important that we all do that work of uplifting these stories. As the lines between black culture and popular culture continue to blur, it's important that we hold ourselves responsible for being curious enough to dig deeper into the stories and lives that we think we know and empowered enough to make our voices heard when we want to speak. Whether that work is done passively as a listener of music, or actively as a writer or song-maker, it's work that must be done to prove to ourselves that we are worthy of being heard. And it's not about being glamorous or luxurious; we don't have to wait until we've been elected President or until we've given speeches on the Lincoln Memorial. This is the kind of work that starts with a whisper and can only grow louder from there. And if we don't tell our stories, someone else will.

LUPE FIASCO, "DELIVER"

[VERSE 1]

(POW)

30-SOMETHING SHOTS FROM THE GHETTO GUN
ALL IN THE EARS OF THE GHETTO YOUNG
SOME GHETTO GIRLS, SOME GHETTO SONS
THROWING ROCKS AT THE BUS AND OTHER GHETTO FUN
I ALWAYS WONDERED WHERE THE GHETTO FROM
CAUSE I'M FROM THE GHETTO, THE NEVER GHETTO COME
BUZZ YOU IN IF THE BELL OF MY GHETTO RUNG
AND IF THE GHETTO LOSE, THAT MEAN A GHETTO WON
THAT'S HOW THEY DO THE GHETTO, THAT'S HOW THE GHETTO
DONE
THEY KEEP IT, THEY NEVER BRING THE GHETTO NONE
WHAT MAKE THE GHETTO TICK, MAKE THE GHETTO RUN
WHAT MAKE THE GHETTO SICK, MAKE THE GHETTO DUMB
THESE NIGGAS OFF THAT GHETTO BEER AND THAT GHETTO
RUM
AND THAT GHETTO BASS WITH MY GHETTO DRUMS
AND MY GHETTO WORDS AND THESE GHETTO PROBLEMS GET
GHETTO SUMS
THAT'S WHY...

[HOOK: LUPE FIASCO & TY DOLLA \$IGN]

THE PIZZA MAN DON'T COME HERE NO MORE
TOO MUCH DOPE, TOO MANY NIGGAS ON THE PORCH
SO THE PIZZA MAN DON'T APPROACH (NO, NO, NO)
PIZZA MAN DON'T COME HERE NO MORE
TOO MANY NIGGAS ON THE BLOCK, TOO MANY NIGGAS
GETTING SHOT
SO THE PIZZA MAN DON'T STOP (POW, POW, POW)
THE PIZZA MAN DON'T COME HERE NO MORE
TOO MANY NIGGAS GETTING ROBBED, NIGGAS DON'T WANNA
STARVE
BUT "NIGGAS AIN'T GOT NO JOBS, BLAH BLAH BLAH"
THE PIZZA MAN DON'T COME HERE NO MORE
DELIVER, DELIVER, DELIVER

[VERSE 2]

IS IT CAUSE THEY'RE SELLING NICKS OUT THERE ALL DAY
CAUSE A PROSTITUTE SUCKING DICK IN THE HALLWAY
LITTLE CAESAR'S NEVER SENDING PIZZA OUT Y'ALL WAY
PAPA JOHNS NEVER GET DELIVERED WHERE Y'ALL STAYED

THE GHETTO WAS A PHYSICAL MANIFESTATION
OF HATE IN A PLACE WHERE ETHNICITY DETERMINES YOUR
PLACEMENT
A PLACE THAT DEFINES YOUR STATION
REMINDE YOU NIGGAS YOUR PLACE IS THE BASEMENT
WHITE PEOPLE IN THE ATTIC
NIGGAS SELLING DOPE, WHITE PEOPLE IS THE ADDICTS
WHITE FOLKS ACT LIKE THEY AIN'T SHOW US HOW TO
TRAFFIC
ALL THAT DOPE TO CHINA, YOU DON'T CALL THAT TRAPPIN'?
BREAKING BAD, LEARNED THAT FROM A TV
SO DON'T SAY IT'S POLITICS WHEN YOU SEE ME
WHEN YOU GON' APOLOGIZE FOR YOUR CD
NIGGA, THAT DON'T MATCH RED AND BLACK TO A GD

[HOOK]

THE PIZZA MAN DON'T COME HERE NO MORE
TOO MUCH DOPE, TOO MANY NIGGAS ON THE PORCH
SO THE PIZZA MAN DON'T APPROACH (NO, NO, NO)
PIZZA MAN DON'T COME HERE NO MORE
TOO MANY NIGGAS ON THE BLOCK, TOO MANY NIGGAS
GETTING SHOT
SO THE PIZZA MAN DON'T STOP (POW, POW, POW)
THE PIZZA MAN DON'T COME HERE NO MORE
TOO MANY NIGGAS GETTING ROBBED, NIGGAS DON'T WANNA
STARVE
BUT "NIGGAS AIN'T GOT NO JOBS, BLAH BLAH BLAH"
THE PIZZA MAN DON'T COME HERE NO MORE
DELIVER, DELIVER, DELIVER

[VERSE 3]

CAN I GET DELIVERED FROM THE SIN?
GET A LITTLE SLICE OF HEAVEN, I CAN ENTER IN AGAIN
OR MAYBE JUST IMAGINE THAT I'M LIVING IN A MANSION
OR A PALACE AND MY PIZZA GETS DELIVERED IN A BENZ
MAKE A SAVIOR OUT OF SAVAGE LIKE THEY MADE IT OUT OF
MAGIC
SO IT TAKE A NIGGA HAVOC AND IT MAKE IT INTO FRIENDS
YOU DON'T EVEN NEED A SALAD, IT DON'T MAKE A NIGGA
FATTER
ACTUALLY TAKE A NIGGA BACKWARDS AND MAKE A NIGGA
THIN

THAT'S A DEEP DISH, CHICAGO STYLE GET THE PEACE STICK
HOME RUN HITTER, I BE DRILLING ON THE WEAK PITCH
PAY INTO THE PLATE THEN I PUT IT IN YOUR FACE
I'M A MAN, NEVER BITING ON THE HANDS THAT I EAT WITH
NO GIORDANO OR DIGIORNO
HOMEMADE BULL CITY BRING IT TO HIM LIKE A TORO
THROWING DOUGH UP IN THE AIR-BOTTOM TO THE TOP AND
SHREDDER
FULL OF CHEESE SMARTER THAN A PURPLE NINJA TURTLE

[HOOK]

NIGGA, PIZZA MAN DON'T COME HERE NO MORE
TOO MUCH DOPE, TOO MANY NIGGAS ON THE PORCH
SO THE PIZZA MAN DON'T APPROACH (NO, NO, NO)
PIZZA MAN DON'T COME HERE NO MORE
TOO MANY NIGGAS ON THE BLOCK, TOO MANY NIGGAS
GETTING SHOT
SO THE PIZZA MAN DON'T STOP (POW, POW, POW)
THE PIZZA MAN DON'T COME HERE NO MORE
TOO MANY NIGGAS GETTING ROBBED, NIGGAS DON'T WANNA
STARVE
BUT "NIGGAS AIN'T GOT NO JOBS, BLAH BLAH BLAH"
THE PIZZA MAN DON'T COME HERE NO MORE (HERE NO MORE)
DELIVER, DELIVER, DELIVER

[OUTRO: TY DOLLA \$IGN]

SO SAD CAUSE THE PIZZA MAN DON'T FUCK WIT US NO MORE
NO, NO, NO, NO, NO, NO

SABA, "LIFE"

[VERSE 1]

I GOT ANGELS RUNNIN' 'WAY, I GOT DEMONS HUNTIN' ME
I KNOW 'PAC WAS 25, I KNOW JESUS 33
I TELL DEATH TO KEEP A DISTANCE, I THINK HE OBSESSED
WITH ME
I SAY, "GOD, THAT'S A WOMAN," I KNOW SHE WOULD DIE FOR
ME
THEY WANT A BARCODE ON MY WRIST (BARCODE ON MY
WRIST)
TO AUCTION OFF THE KIDS
THAT DON'T FIT THEIR DESCRIPTION OF A UTOPIA (BLACK)
LIKE A PROBLEM WON'T EXIST IF I JUST DON'T EXIST
IF I GREW UP WITHOUT A SINGLE POT TO PISS IN
PARDON ME FOR VENTIN'
CONGRESS GOT THE NERVE TO CALL THEYSELF RELIGIOUS
RICH JUST GETTIN' RICHER, WE JUST TRYNA LIVE OUR **LIFE**

[CHORUS]

MOMMA MIXED THE VODKA WITH THE SPRITE
THEY KILLED MY COUSIN WITH A POCKET KNIFE
WHILE MY UNCLE ON THE PHONE
HE WAS GONE FOR MORE THAN HALF MY **LIFE**
HE GOT OUT A YEAR AND THEN HE DIED
I WAS HONOR ROLL, TALKING TO MY FATHER ON THE PHONE
LEFT THE CITY WHEN I WAS JUST FOUR
NONE OF THEM WILL GET ALONG
MOMMA BEGGIN' HIM FOR WINTER COATS
I WAS CHILLIN' WITH MY NIGGA SPOOK NOW THEY TRYNA
TAKE HIS—

[POST-CHORUS]

LIFE DON'T MEAN SHIT TO A NIGGA THAT AIN'T NEVER HAD
SHIT, YEAH
LIGHT DON'T MEAN LIT IN THE DARK, FIGHT DON'T MEAN
FISTS, OOH
EYES DON'T SEE, EYES DON'T SEE, ICE DON'T FREEZE
LIGHT DON'T LEAVE, I DON'T MEAN LIE TO ME

[BRIDGE]

TELL ME IT'LL BE OKAY, TELL ME HAPPIER DAYS
TELL ME THAT SHE MY BAE, THAT I WON'T BE ALONE
TELL 'EM I'LL BE OKAY WHEN HE ASK, "HOW'S MY DAY?"

TELL 'EM THAT WE THE SAME, TELL EM' THAT WE NOT SAFE

[VERSE 2]

I GOT MY GRANDDADDY SOUL, I'M AT WAR, THAT'S ON MY
MIND
I SEEN WALTER BODY COLD, WISH I COULD SWITCH IT WITH
MINE
I'M NOT WORRIED 'BOUT NO RAP SHIT, DISTRACTIONS OR
WASTE-OF-TIMES
I STILL GO TO SOCIAL FUNCTIONS EVEN THOUGH I'M SO ANTI—
NO, I'M NO RIHANNA, THE COURT GONNA THROW IT LIKE
DONOVAN
DOWN A BIT, I JUST BEEN MODELIN' MY WHOLE CAREER
AS IF 'PAC WAS HERE, STUDIO MONITORS SHAKIN'
I RAISE THE APARTMENTS, I'M BONO WITH PROFIT
I MADE WHAT I MADE IN ALLOTTED
AMOUNT OF TIME THE SAME AMOUNT OF TIME YOU WAS
WATCHIN'
SO STOP COMPARING ME TO PEOPLE, NO, I AM NOT THEM
A LOT OF PEOPLE DREAM UNTIL THEY SHIT'LL GET—
GUNSHOT

[CHORUS]

THAT'S **LIFE**, MOMMA MIXED THE VODKA WITH THE SPRITE
THEY KILLED MY COUSIN WITH A POCKET KNIFE
WHILE MY UNCLE ON THE PHONE
HE WAS GONE FOR MORE THAN HALF MY **LIFE**
HE GOT OUT A YEAR AND THEN HE DIED
I WAS HONOR ROLL, TALKING TO MY FATHER ON THE PHONE
LEFT THE CITY WHEN I WAS JUST FOUR
NONE OF THEM WILL GET ALONG
MOMMA BEGGIN' HIM FOR WINTER COATS
I WAS CHILLIN' WITH MY NIGGA SPOOK NOW THEY TRYNA
TAKE HIS **LIFE**

CHANCE THE RAPPER, "ANGELS"

[INTRO: CHANCE THE RAPPER]

ANGELS, NA, NA, NA, NA, AH

[VERSE 1: CHANCE THE RAPPER]

I GOT MY CITY DOING FRONT FLIPS
WHEN EVERY FATHER, MAYOR, RAPPER JUMP SHIP
I GUESS THAT'S WHY THEY CALL IT WHERE I STAY
CLEAN UP THE STREETS, SO MY DAUGHTER CAN HAVE
SOMEWHERE TO PLAY
I'M THE BLUEPRINT TO A REAL MAN
SOME OF THESE NIGGAS TOSS THEY TASSEL FOR A DEAL MAN
I AIN'T GOIN' TO HELL OR TO HILLMAN
IGH, IGH, IGH, IGH, FOR MY REAL FANS
I GOT CAUGHT UP WITH A LITTLE XAN
CAN'T STOP ME BUT IT SLOW ME THOUGH
YEAH A NIGGA FAMOUS, YOU DON'T KNOW ME THOUGH
BUT EVERY DJ STILL PLAY ME THOUGH
DAMN MAN, I DON'T EVEN NEED A RADIO
AND MY NEW SHIT SOUND LIKE A RODEO
GOT THE OLD FOLKS DANCING THE DO-SI-DO
'TIL THEY FUCK AROUND AND SIGN ME TO OVO
OOOH, I JUST MIGHT SHARE MY NEXT ONE WITH KEEF
GOT THE INDUSTRY IN DISBELIEF, THEY BE ASKING FOR BEEF
THIS WHAT IT SOUND LIKE WHEN GOD SPLIT AN ATOM WITH ME
I EVEN HAD STEVE GIVING OUT APPLES FOR FREE

[CHORUS: SABA]

THEY WAS TALKING "WOO THIS WOO WAP DA BAM"
CITY SO DAMN GREAT, I FEEL LIKE ALEXAND'
WEAR YOUR HALO LIKE A HAT, THAT'S LIKE THE LATEST
FASHION
I GOT ANGELS ALL AROUND ME THEY KEEP ME SURROUNDED

[POST-CHORUS: CHANCE THE RAPPER]

WHO IS YOU, AND WHO THE FUCK IS YOU, AND WHO IS HIM?
ALL OF A SUDDEN, WOO WAP DA BAM
YOU CAN'T TOUCH ME
NA, NA, NA, NA, I GOT ANGELS
I GOT ANGELS

[VERSE 2: CHANCE THE RAPPER]

I AIN'T CHANGE MY NUMBER SINCE THE SEVENTH GRADE
THIS FOR MY DAY ONE, TEN YEARS, SEVEN DAYS
A WEEK, NIGGAS NEVER TIRED ON THEY KEVIN GATES

AND IF THEY REST IN PEACE THEY BUNNY HOPPING HEAVEN'S
GATES

IT'S TOO MANY YOUNG ANGELS ON THE SOUTHSIDE
GOT US SCARED TO LET OUR GRANDMOMMAS OUTSIDE
YOU GON' MAKE ME TAKE THE CAMPERS WAY DOWNTOWN
YOU GON' MAKE ME TURN MY BM TO MY HOUSEWIFE
I JUST HAD A GROWTH SPURT
IT DONE TOOK SO LONG, MY TIPPY TOES HURT
YOU CAN KEEP THE NOSE RING, I DON'T HAVE TO SOUL SEARCH
I'M STILL AT MY OLD CHURCH, ONLY EVER SOLD MERCH
GRANDMA SAY I'M KOSHER, MOMMA SAY I'M CULTURE
GCI, 1-0-7-5, ANGEL GOIN' LIVE
POWER 92, ANGEL, JUKE, ANGEL GON' JUKE
GCI, 1-0-7-5, GOIN' LIVE
POWER 92, ANGEL GON' JUKE, JUKE, JUKE, JUKE

[CHORUS: SABA & CHANCE THE RAPPER]

THEY WAS TALKING "WOO THIS WOO WAP DA BAM"
CITY SO DAMN GREAT, I FEEL LIKE ALEXAND'
WEAR YOUR HALO LIKE A HAT, THAT'S LIKE THE LATEST
FASHION
I GOT ANGELS ALL AROUND ME, THEY KEEP ME SURROUNDED
WAP THE BAM (NA, NA, NA, NA)
I GOT ANGELS
(I GOT ANGELS) I GOT ANGELS ALL AROUND ME THEY KEEP ME
SURROUNDED
NA, NA, NA, NA
I GOT, I GOT ANGELS
THEY WAS TALKING "WOO WOO, THIS WOO WAP DA BAM"
CITY SO DAMN GREAT, I FEEL LIKE ALEXAND'
WEAR YOUR HALO LIKE A HAT, THAT'S LIKE THE LATEST
FASHION
I GOT ANGELS ALL AROUND ME, THEY KEEP ME SURROUNDED

[POST-CHORUS: CHANCE THE RAPPER]

WHO IS YOU, AND WHO THE FUCK IS YOU, AND WHO IS HIM?
ALL OF A SUDDEN, WOO WAP DA BAM
YOU CAN'T TOUCH ME
NA, NA, NA, NA, I GOT ANGELS
I GOT, I GOT ANGELS
NA, NA
NA, NA
I GOT, I GOT

TOBI LOU, "SOLANGE"

[INTRO]

QUIT MY JOB
CAN YOU HIT THE UHH
QUIT MY JOB ON A MONDAY
(MONDAY)
ACTUALLY CAN YOU TAKE IT OFF?
(YEAH, YEAH, YEAH, YEAH, YEAH, YEAH)

[VERSE 1]

I QUIT MY JOB ON A MONDAY
I TOLD MY BOSS "I'M THE BOSS NOW"
HE TOLD ME HE DON'T GIVE A FUCK, SO
I TOLD HIM HE CAN SIT THE FUCK DOWN
TOBI, WHY YOU CURSE SO MUCH NOW?
I DON'T KNOW, BUT I LIKE IT
ONE HAND ON MY PRIVATE
MOON WALKING LIKE MIKE, BITCH!
I PUT THE STARS IN MY EYELIDS
I JUST NEED A LITTLE GUIDANCE
YOU KNOW HOW CRAZY THE CHI IS?
I CAN'T SAY NO TO VIOLENCE
I MIGHT ATTACK ON THE TITAN
USED TO BE AFRAID OF WHITE MAN
THE ONES IN THE BLUE, THEY MADE IT GO BOOM
THEY HAD BROUGHT THE THUNDER AND LIGHTENING
I WAS TOO BLACK FOR THEIR LIKING
I WAS THAT NIGGA, UH!
SITTIN' IN A BIG OL' TRUCK
WHIPPIN' LIKE MRS. PUFF

[CHORUS]

HAIR UP LIKE SUZIE
HIT THE J LIKE JUICY
SHOULDER LEAN, SHOULDER LEAN, SHOULDER LEAN LIKE UZI
SHOULDER LEAN LIKE DRO
WATER BEAM THAT HO
YOU BROKE MY HEART LAST SUMMER
BUT I DON'T NEED IT NO MO'

HAIR UP LIKE SUZIE
HIT THE J LIKE JUICY
SHOULDER LEAN, SHOULDER LEAN, SHOULDER LEAN LIKE UZI

SHOULDER LEAN LIKE DRO
WATER BEAM THAT HO
YOU BROKE MY HEART LAST SUMMER
BUT I DON'T NEED IT NO MO'

[VERSE 2]

TRY TO SMOKE IT AWAY
BUT THIS SHIT AIN'T GOIN' AWAY
I AIN'T BEEN HOME IN SOME DAYS
I DON'T KNOW WHERE I'M GON' STAY
REMEMBER WHEN I SLEPT IN MY CAR?
REMEMBER WHEN YOU FOUND ME IN THE YARD?
I WAS PASSED OUT ON THE LAWN
YOU TOLD ME NOT TO TAKE IT TOO FAR

[CHORUS]

HAIR UP LIKE SUZIE
HIT THE J LIKE JUICY
SHOULDER LEAN, SHOULDER LEAN, SHOULDER LEAN LIKE UZI
SHOULDER LEAN LIKE DRO
WATER BEAM THAT HO
YOU BROKE MY HEART LAST SUMMER
BUT I DON'T NEED IT NO MO'

[VERSE 3: TOBI LOU & FACER]

I GOT THE WORLD IN MY PALM
I TELL YOUR GIRL TO HOLD ON
I'M NOT A NATURAL BLONDE
HAIR LONG LIKE SOLANGE
HAIR LONG LIKE SOLANGE
(FRESH OUT THE SALON, HAIR LONG LIKE SOLANGE, HAIR
LONG LIKE SOLANGE)
I DON'T KNOW MAYBE I'M WRONG
(I, I DO WHAT I WANT)
I DON'T KNOW MAYBE I'M WRONG
BUT LATELY I WANT YOU AROUND
I HAD SOME UPS AND SOME DOWNS
BUT STILL CAME FRESH OUT THE SALON
STILL GOT THE WORLD IN MY PALM
BITCH, PASS IT TO YOU LIKE A BATON
HAIR LONG LIKE SOLANGE
I CUT THAT BITCH OUT LIKE MULAN

I'VE NEVER BEEN TO MILAN
I'M GETTING BETTER WITH TIME
LEATHER JACKET LIKE THE FONZ
I GOTTA GO WITH THE CHARM
HAIR LONG LIKE SOLANGE
I DO WHATEVER I WANT
I MIGHT JUST DYE IT TOMORROW
HAIR BLONDE LIKE SOLANGE

[OUTRO: FACER]

SHE SAID, SHE SAID OHH
FRESH, FRESH, FRESH, FRESH, FRESH
FRESH OUT THE SALON
HAIR ALL LIKE SOLANGE
USUALLY I DO JUST WHAT I WANT
I COULD CUT YOU OFF
HAIR GO LIKE SOLANGE
FRESH OUT THE SALON
TRYNA ROLL THE ZOOBIE WITH SILANTRA
GOT IT FROM THE FARM

NONAME, “CASKET PRETTY” AND “BLAXPLOITATION”

“CASKET PRETTY”

[HOOK]

ALL OF MY NIGGAS IS CASKET PRETTY
AIN'T NO ONE SAFE IN THIS HAPPY CITY
I HOPE YOU MAKE IT HOME
I HOPE TO GOD THAT MY TELE' DON'T RING
NIGGAS IS CASKET PRETTY
AIN'T NO ONE SAFE IN THIS HAPPY CITY
I HOPE YOU MAKE IT HOME
I HOPE TO GOD THAT MY TELE' DON'T RING

[VERSE]

I'VE BEEN SEARCHING FOR GOD IN THE BOTTLE HE GAVE ME
ASHES TO ASHES, DEARLY DEPARTED, REGARDED AS HOLY
DON'T HOLD ME, DON'T HOLD ME WHEN NIGGAS IS DYING AND
DYING
AND I'M AFRAID OF THE DARK, BLUE AND THE WHITE
BADGES AND PISTOLS REJOICE IN THE NIGHT
AND WE WATCH THE NEWS, AND WE SEE HIM DIE TONIGHT
TONIGHT THE NIGHT HIS BABY SAID GOODBYE
ROSES IN THE ROAD, TEDDY BEAR OUTSIDE, BULLET THERE ON
THE RIGHT
WHERE'S LOVE WHEN YOU NEED IT?
TOO MANY BABIES IN SUITS
TOO MANY BABIES IN SUITS
BACK BEFORE THE DAWN, RICOCHET THE PAWN
BULLET IN THE CHEST, YOU AIN'T MEAN NO HARM
COLLECTING YOUR CHECKMATE, I KNOW YOU IN LOVE WITH THE
POWER
IT'S FLOWERS AT EVERY OCCASION
I NEED ME A MEDICINE MAN
SOMEBODY HEAL ME, SOMEBODY TAKE MY HAND

[HOOK]

ALL OF MY NIGGAS IS CASKET PRETTY
AIN'T NO ONE SAFE IN THIS HAPPY CITY
I HOPE YOU MAKE IT HOME
I HOPE TO GOD THAT MY TELE' DON'T RING
NIGGAS IS CASKET PRETTY
AIN'T NO ONE SAFE IN THIS HAPPY CITY
I HOPE YOU MAKE IT HOME
I HOPE TO GOD THAT MY TELE' DON'T RING

“BLAXPLOITATION”

[INTRO]

WHAT HAPPENED TO MY HUNDRED DOLLARS JOE?
NIGGA, DID YOU TAKE MY MONEY?
HEH-HEH, THAT'S RIGHT LIL BITCH!

[VERSE 1]

PENNY PROUD, PENNY PETTY, PISSING OFF BETTY THE BOOP
ONLY DATE NIGGAS THAT HOOP, TRADED MY LIFE FOR
CARTOON
DANCE MONKEY DANCE, CATHEDRAL GON' PAY ME GOOD
TONIGHT
EATING CHICK-FIL-A IN THE SHADOWS, THAT TASTE LIKE
HYPOCRITE
MMM, YUMMY TASTY, MMM, MMM, YUMMY TASTY
WAFFLE FRY MY EMPATHY, BITCHES JUST REALLY LAZY
MAYBE I'M A HYPOCRITE, MAYBE I'M HYPOCHONDRIAC
I'M STRUGGLING TO SIMMER DOWN, MAYBE I'M AN INSOMNI-
BLACK
BAD SLEEP TRIGGERED BY BAD GOVERNMENT
WRITE A THINK PIECE IN THE RAP SONG, THE NEW AGE
COVENANT
IF YOU REALLY THINK I'M COOKING CRACKIN, PASS ME THE
OVEN MITTS
CAPTAIN WATCH A LIL BITCH GO CRUNCH AND WONDER HOW
EVERYTHING HAPPEN

[BRIDGE]

MY PEOPLE STARTED RUNNING A LONG TIME AGO
AND THEY ARE STILL FIGHTING
REVOLUTION WAS NEVER MEANT TO BE EASY
THIS IS NOT YOUR FIGHT, BLACK MAN
WHAT IS THIS TO YOU?
IT'S NOT A MATTER OF COLOR
FREEDOM IS EVERYBODY'S BUSINESS

[VERSE 2]

UH, YEAH, ANTI-POLITICAL MYTHICAL IN THE PICTURE
YOUR NIGGA JUST MOVED TO WICKER
YOUR MAMMY STAY ON THE SOUTH SIDE
SHE PAID TO CLEAN YOUR HOUSE, POWER OF PINESOL, BABY

SHE THE SCRUB TUB LADY
SHE THAT NAKED BITCH IN VIDEOS, THAT DRUNK CLUB LADY
IMMORTALIZED ALL '80S AND THEN SHE REAL, REAL NASTY
KEEP THE HOT SAUCE IN HER PURSE AND SHE BE REAL, REAL
BLACKY
JUST LIKE A HILLARY CLINTON, WHO MASQUERADED THE
SYSTEM
WHO CHICKEN-BONED, WATERMELON-ED
TRADED HOODIE FOR HIPSTER, INFATUATED THE MINSTREL
WHEN WE COOL, THEY COOL, WE DIE AS COON
WE SUPA FLY INDIGENOUS, NOW HOP TO THE MOON
WHO WROTE THE MOVIE TO AMERICA? IT'S STILL COMING
SOON

[OUTRO]

DO YOU HEAR ME MAN?
DO YOU UNDERSTAND? I AM BLACK
I'M A NIGGA, DO YOU UNDERSTAND ME?
I WAS BORN BLACK, I LIVE BLACK, AND I'MA DIE PROBABLY
BECAUSE I'M BLACK, BECAUSE SOME CRACKER THAT KNOWS
I'M BLACK BETTER THAN YOU, NIGGA, IS PROBABLY GONNA
PUT A BULLET IN THE BACK OF MY HEADON'T DO YOU HARM

NOTES

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Chapter 2: An Abbreviated History of Black Chicago

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