

Amidst the symphony of human experience, few mediums possess the power of music. It has the extraordinary ability to express emotions, narrate stories, and capture the essence of a moment perfectly. LeAlan Jones and Lloyd Newman's "Our America" provides a detailed account of life within the confines of the Ida B. Wells housing project. "Our America" delves into the struggles and triumphs of the residents of Ida B. Through the lens of music, we will explore LeAlan and Lloyd's experiences. This will serve not only to mirror the events depicted by "Our America," but also to illuminate the themes found throughout the text.

In the beginning of the first section of "Our America," LeAlan and Lloyd describe the environment that they live in. They describe gun violence, gangs, drugs, and the physical environment. The housing project becomes a microcosm of society, where residents grapple with poverty, violence, and systemic neglect. One song that represents this portion of the book is "Gunz N Butter" by A\$AP Rocky and Juicy J. Rocky and Juicy J discuss the realities of street life, specifically gun violence and drugs. Further, the song discusses the implications of guns and drugs being in the streets. This reflects how, similarly, "Our America" discusses the implications of guns and drugs in the streets. Further, LeAlan and Lloyd recall walking through the hood: "Bums on the street. An abandoned church. A helicopter. There goes somebody we thought was dead—guess he ain't dead." "Gunz N Butter" also describes similar implications to guns and drugs being in the community.

As the first section progresses, the first interviewees begin to be introduced.. At first, LeAlan interviews his family members including his grandmother, mother, and older

sister. They discuss the topics of family and relationships amongst the violence in their community. It becomes obvious that family is extremely important in LeAlan's life and the lives of those around him. The theme of familial love becomes very prevalent as LeAlan interviews his family. One song that reflects these moments in the book perfectly is "Kody Blu 31" by JID. JID raps about his family growing up in the dangerous Zone 6 of Atlanta, a setting reminiscent of the challenges faced by LeAlan and his family. He pays respects to his mother, grandmother, and sister and thanks them for supporting him while he grew up. Like JID, LeAlan expresses gratitude for the support of his family, emphasizing the strength of family in the face of adversity. Through JID's storytelling and LeAlan's interviews, both the song and the book offer a glimpse into the profound impact of family amidst the struggles of urban life.

As the book moves on to the second portion, we get a terrible depiction of 5-year-old Eric Morse's death. Eric was thrown out of a 14th story window by two other young children. This was a devastating incident that impacted the nation for months, and the community for years to come. Politicians kept ignoring the incident and there were no changes made. This incident is what caused LeAlan and Lloyd to begin their journalism careers. In order to adequately represent this section of the book, I wanted to choose a song that not only speaks about the dangerous life in the hood, but also the intimate feelings of regret, remorse, and empathy when faced with a tragic death. I am choosing "How Much a Dollar Cost," by Kendrick Lamar. In "How Much a Dollar Cost," Kendrick Lamar recounts an encounter with a homeless man who asks him for money. Initially dismissive, Kendrick later realizes the gravity of the situation. The song unfolds with Kendrick reflecting on his actions and the missed opportunity to show compassion,

leading to feelings of guilt and remorse. The parallels between Kendrick's song and the story of Eric Morse are prevalent. Both narratives delve into the consequences of violence and the weight of decisions made at the moment. Kendrick's remorse on the cost of his actions serves as a reminder of the impact of violence and the importance of empathy.

LeAlan and Lloyd decided that they had to do something to create a change in their community that no one else was willing to fight for. They decide to cause this change by interviewing multiple people in the community. They interviewed people who live in the same building that Eric died in, random community members, children, and Eric's mother and brother. In order to accurately represent this section, it is important to discuss the feelings of the community and the ambitions of LeAlan and Lloyd. In order to represent LeAlan and Lloyd's mission to cause change in their community, I have chosen the song "Changes," by Tupac. This iconic rap song addresses themes of social injustice, systemic oppression, and the desire for change. It reflects the activism and determination of LeAlan and Lloyd to embark on their mission. "Changes" serves as an anthem of empowerment and resilience that inspires people to create a better future, just as LeAlan and Lloyd were trying to do. To represent the mourning of community members after Eric's tragic death, I have chosen the song "Rise Up," by Andra Day. Many of the community members that the boys interview, including Eric's mother, express hope for the future. They also express hope for the boys who killed Eric. "Rise Up" encapsulates the spirit of resilience and hope in the face of turmoil, representing the community's grief and determination to seek a better future. The song features an

uplifting melody and sentimental lyrics that perfectly represent the feelings of the community in this portion of the book.

In the first part of the third section, LeAlan and Lloyd explore the contrasts between life in the Ida B. Wells housing project and the neighborhood on Chicago's North Side. They conduct interviews with residents from both areas, highlighting the disparities in economic and social status, access to resources, and quality of life. LeAlan and Lloyd's interviews with various community members provide a variety of emotions, struggles, and resilience. Through their work, they amplify voices that might otherwise remain unheard. The raw authenticity of their interviews allows readers to connect with the individuals behind the statistics, bridging the gap between distant headlines and lived experiences. As they compare these two areas and the lives of people in each area, the themes of social injustice, poverty, and the longing for change emerge. The song "The Story of O.J." by Jay-Z represents this section perfectly. The song addresses themes of race, wealth, and identity of African-Americans. Jay-Z provides lyrics about the impact of systemic racism and economic disparities on African-Americans. In the context of the book, "The Story of O.J." reflects the realities faced by residents of the Ida B. Wells housing project, compared with the privilege of the North Side neighborhood.

In the final section of the book, LeAlan and Lloyd continue their exploration of inequality and injustice. They want to amplify the voices of marginalized communities and advocate for them. The song "Alright" by Kendrick Lamar encapsulates the themes in this section. Kendrick's lyrics reflect the indomitable spirit of LeAlan and Lloyd as they confront the inequities that shape their lives and the lives of those around them. The

song inspires and motivates people ready to cause change. The song repeatedly describes a bad situation and then proclaims that they will be alright. When Kendrick proclaims, "We gon' be alright," he encapsulates the spirit of endurance—the unwavering belief that despite adversity, there's a collective strength that can propel them forward. It reflects LeAlan and Lloyd's mission to create change and expose the harsh lives they and others live every day. Additionally, this song represents the negative events that people experience every day when living in the hood. Just as Kendrick's lyrics acknowledge the darkness, they also hold space for hope. It's a reminder that even in the bleakest moments, there's a glimmer of possibility—a chance to create something better. It serves to highlight all of the important parts in this section of the book including the stories and feelings of those living in poor communities, the stories of those who are fortunate enough to live in a better area, and the drive to improve one's life.

In the symphony of human experience, the melodies of music serve as powerful echoes of our stories, our struggles, and our triumphs. Through the lens of music, LeAlan Jones and Lloyd Newman's "Our America" comes alive, each song serving to represent the themes and feelings of each section. From the realities of life in the Ida B. Wells housing project to the moments of familial love and the tragic loss of young Eric Morse, music becomes a vessel through which the themes and emotions of the book are presented. In conclusion, the soundtrack for "Our America" serves as a symphony of voices, and in many ways, the voice of Eric Morse. As the final notes fade into the distance, they leave behind a lingering echo of resilience and possibility, a reminder of the struggles and mission of young LeAlan and Lloyd.

