

MUSIC AND ACTIVISM: ANALYZING “FIGHT THE POWER”
IN SOCIAL JUSTICE MOVEMENTS

by

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A master’s thesis submitted to the Graduate Faculty in Liberal Studies in partial fulfillment of
the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts, The City University of New York

2023

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This manuscript has been read and accepted for the Graduate Faculty in Liberal Studies in satisfaction of the thesis requirement for the degree of Master of Science.

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ABSTRACT

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It is still fresh in our memories that we witnessed the case of George Floyd's murder by excessive police brutality in 2020. The video footage spread around the world overnight, and despite the incident that occurred during the first ever COVID-19 quarantine period, it caught the attention of people worldwide and led to protests in support of humanity and Black lives. At that time, even though a lot of people stayed inside, the protests were seen every week nationwide, and it also made a global movement. What made it remarkable was that, while the protestors delivered their message, they played Public Enemy's "Fight the Power" in the background. The song was originally released in 1989, and during the Rodney King's case with 4 abusive police officer's trial in 1992, the song sparked a movement for the rise of Black culture. The song was more than 30 years old when the movement followed the Floyd's murder. It revealed that people still have to raise their voices for the same issue and for the same cause after good 30 years. But have we really not overcome in the last 30 years? The internet is a common standard in this century, and the world is smaller as reaching out for a 70-year old's wisdom in a small village of 8,000 miles of distance or a New York Times' best selling author is now a click away. With all the progress we achieved, do we still “fight the power” with a 30-year old song? This project explores how things have changed around the song with data.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

PREFACE: WHY “FIGHT THE POWER”?

I would love to emphasize that the emergence of hip hop has always been my core value and the dynamics of my lifestyle to date. The culture facilitated the opportunity to learn about the world, in a way that I would have never explored without it. Personally, I grew up in the neighborhood of the US Navy Base, where we see Americans every day while not so many other areas of Japan resemble the model. Even so, however, delving into racism was never a common idea as all the other areas in Japan, even though I felt what I felt, not knowing what it was. Developing my interest in the culture, hip hop has had a profound impact on me – it shaped my views on not only racism but also the influence of wealth in all directions, the unsolved poverty issues in developed countries, etc. I extensively learned about misogyny that came with questionable gender-biased lyrics, as well as how to optimize limited resources for maximum fun, and most importantly helped me discover who I am. I sported myself with hop hop gear, which could now be considered cultural appropriation – even though that was the way I paid extreme homage to hip hop by doing so. But above all that, hip hop has brought all these positive energy and impacts with the coolest beat of all time. Fast-forward, I moved to Brooklyn in my adult age and I am literally delighted every day that I get to see the murals and street names of my hip hop idols, the names of the school districts and subway stations that were repeated in hip hop songs since I was in Japan. People speak in an accent that I have only heard in the interview videos from the 90s (because most of the sailors in Japan were mainly from the South). Seriously, it’s like living in an amusement park every day for me.

I was inspired by many talented hip hop artists along the way, many of whom are now successful business leaders in the community, or on a the global scale. I have always dreamed of becoming at least half as the legendary as business moguls like Jay-Z or P Diddy or Swizz Beatz,

right here in New York City and ended up pursuing an MBA degree at Baruch College CUNY. Initially, I decided to commence my education at a college that has a name of an activist from 60s civil rights movement¹, CUNY Medgar Evers College where the late Malcolm X's wife, Professor Betty Shabazz taught, in search of the answers to the problems that the world still needs to solve for the basic human rights. Overall, I wouldn't have had the information and passion for education if it weren't for hip hop. In short, I am a little closer to who I wanted to become since I first ever encountered hip hop at young age. As the culmination of my studies, I am grateful that I am given an opportunity to work on the best of my interest for this capstone project at CUNY Graduate Center.

Even though I grew up in the city where numbers of sailors migrate after service and create their own community, Japan itself is inherently a very homogenous country and Japanese people value their unique traditions. Or so I thought. However, in some small groups in the local community, I have quite noticed Americans' condescending attitude towards local people, being strongly opinionating on how we Japanese people should act or speak in our own country. The majority of them were still prouiding themselves for the legacy of the Vietnam War and they were never wrong. What I felt worse is that they could also be reprimanding us in a very amicable tone, as if their advising is what we asked for. Yes, Japan lost to America in WWII under poor leadership, and the country had to accept a lot of American standards in reforming as a nation. But for my generation, we only knew the fact in the textbooks after Japan had made itself a successful industry model. I always felt awkward when Americans especially those of military retirees speak to us, but I did not know a word to express that awkwardness even though many Japanese people seemed to have no objection to it.

¹ Medgar Wiley Evers, who was assassinated in 1963 during his struggle for freedom in the civil rights movement.

The more I became engaged in hip hop culture, the more opportunities I had to speak with black individuals. I said black individuals instead of Americans because, at some point in the earlier stage, I noticed the Americans I mentioned above, were mostly white people. I did not perceive those awkwardly opinionated attitudes from most of the black sailors. The black people I got to meet in the 90s equally loved hip hop, soul music, and fashion that represent their own culture regardless of their age. I felt more comfortable with “These” Americans. I could talk with them for hours without feeling the need to be excessively polite so it would not fall into my unfavorable conversation and be told off.

I understand that my environment and experience were quite unique but again, it was still not a very common practice to regard the social occurrences in Japan with race problems. However, internally, Japanese people and officials notoriously bully foreigners especially of those from developing countries, but you know, not Americans of course. Japanese people barely connect the repeating abusive treatments against foreigners, dissimulating it does not have anything to do with their race or ethnicity but because of their culpable acts. Sounds familiar?

It took me a while until everything got connected in me. It took me at least two consecutive years in America to understand “racism”, which I used to call “awkwardness” with “Americans” in Japan. It took me an international move from where I was a majority population to a mere minority with no privilege. And after this while, I understood technically and conceptually why hip hop was the one that I had always been into. It was exactly about fighting authority, fighting for freedom, fighting for human rights, and fighting for the future, as Chuck D² said in his song Fight the Power, “making everybody see.”

I initially launched this project to pay homage to my biggest influencer of all time, hip hop –

² Depending on sources, it is spelled both “Chuck D.” and “Chuck D” and this paper consolidates the manner without the period as including periods may also affect on data quality significantly.

literally as a whole, for guiding me to see the extensive yet undermined problems that a society could have anywhere. But as I explore more with new discoveries that I was not aware of when “Fight the Power” song came out, I started to feel I am also the one on a mission that hip hop culture has been committed to. I am grateful for Public Enemy and its spokesperson, Chuck D for bringing us with true awareness in their own method of delivering a message. Representation matters, exactly. For my way of representation which focuses on data and its visualization method, Matt Daniels of The Pudding³ has always been my inspiration. I have never seen so much dedication to hip hop data stories except his work of art to date. And I would like to tribute this capstone project to those who lost their lives at the hands of extreme police brutality because of their beautiful skin color that they were born in. I hope my way of representing data will contribute to creating a better world, just like hip hop has been doing relentlessly.

³A platform for disruptive data visualization methods and data stories.

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DIGITAL MANIFEST

- I. Capstone Whitepaper (PDF)
- II. WARC Files
 - a. Project Website
<https://sho-viz.com/music-social.html>
 - b. Blog Posts
 - c. Digital Edition
- III. Code and other Deliverables
 - a. Zip file containing the contents of the GitHub repository at the time of deposit
<https://github.com/ShokoLocoMocco/sho-viz>

LIST OF VARIABLES

NOTE ON TECHNICAL SPECIFICATIONS

- The entire project was written in R language on the IDE platform (RStudio 2023.03.0+386 "Cherry Blossom").
- R libraries for extracting, loading, transformation (ELT), visualization, GIS, and statistical analysis are used to further analysis for each purposes. To run the code in this project fully, all R packages in the archive package are mandatory (see **LIST OF LIBRARIES**).

In my script, `install.packages()` function is omitted but you may insert if

```
(!require("[package name]")) install.packages("[package name]") before the library()  
function(s). I included the repo location to download the packages from, options(repos =  
"https://cran.rstudio.com") , also some of the packages may require dependencies such as  
rtools and/or processx .
```

- The data used in this project are archived with the versions available as of April 2023, however, the data in the online repository at GitHub may be updated in the future.
- Since this project
- The web-hosted presentation page script was written using Quarto markdown and the .qmd files should be executable on RStudio IDE. Quarto, however, is relatively a new technology as of today (April 2023), and the latest version ($\geq 1.2.0$) of Quarto installation may be recommended to properly execute the .qmd files on RStudio. For more details, visit

<https://quarto.org/docs/guide/>.

- Datasets in the deliverable are converted to .Rds files to reduce the size

CHAPTER 1: INTRO

CHAPTER 2: DATA COLLECTION AND METHODS

CHAPTER 3: DATA PROCESSING FOR ANALYSIS

CHAPTER 4: CONCLUSION AND BEYOND

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[NewJackSwing/Dashboard1.](https://public.tableau.com/app/profile/chimdi.nwosu/viz/IronViz2021-NewJackSwing/Dashboard1)

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<https://www.smithsonianmag.com/smithsonian-institution/long-painful-history-police-brutality-in-the-us-180964098/>

<https://www.musixmatch.com/lyrics/Public-Enemy/Fight-The-Power>

<https://www.mec.cuny.edu/history/life-of-medgar-evers/>

<http://brittanyjrosario.com/engl3180-film-as-literature/do-the-right-thing/>

APPENDIX

LIST OF R LIBRARIES

quarto: for creating word clouds

tidyverse (multiple libraries): for ELT, data manipulation, and visualization

spotifyr: for creating

wordcloud: for creating word clouds

ggiraph: for interactive presentation

gganimate: for creating word clouds

ploty: for creating word clouds

ggcorrplot: for creating word clouds

leaflet: for creating word clouds

spData: for creating word clouds

rvest: for creating word clouds

[Required. Format according to disciplinary style guide, or your own preference. Include chapter headings, page numbers, and bibliography/references/works cited section.]