Tracy Chapman: A Black Female Working Class Voice in 1980s America

Ellen Neary[1]

Tracy Chapman was acclaimed as "the new artist of the year" in the September 1988 issue of *Rolling Stone* magazine (Jackson, 1996, 88). This dissertation will examine how Tracy Chapman's debut album became a channel for addressing the political situation in America during the late 1980s. As a black woman she addresses social problems faced by women during this period in her music and this dissertation will look at how her music places her within the Third Wave Feminist movement. It will explore the genre out of which her music grew and the musical styles that influenced the sound of her music. This dissertation will begin with outlining Chapman's background, especially the elements that had an impact on the development of her music. It will then examine the context of 1980s America and the musical genres and styles that influenced her music. Finally it will give a detailed examination of her 1988 album. Pond describes her first published album as a: "Stunning debut, a collection of songs that sketch the lives of the disenfranchised with vivid clarity and blunt insistent that change had come" (Pond, 1988). This quote highlights Chapman's ability to capture the lives of the voiceless in America and portray the mood of dissatisfaction amongst the marginalised. By the end of the year, the album had sold ten million copies. Pond suggests that the rapid popularity of her debut album was due to "a mixture of definitely optimistic, big-scale political statements", which is seen in songs such as "Talkin' 'bout a Revolution" and "Why". He added that songs such as "Fast Car" and "Behind the Wall" that depict the bleak reality of American life in a candid tone also captured the heart of listeners and aided the success of the album (Pond, 1988). This dissertation will examine these song's lyrics and musicality and argue that they are a direct commentary on social and political conditions in America during the 1980s. Armand White states in *Essence* magazine, July 1988, that the album explores racism, love, and sexism, "delivering poetic images of pain and passion in a potent husky voice" (Jackson, 1996, 89). Similarly in *She's a Rebel: The History of Women in Rock and Roll*, Gillian Gaar argues Chapman's debut success was based on her ability to tackle social matters that were being ignored and neglected by the American government during the 1980s. Issues such as the growing crime rate, the shortcomings in the education system and the rising homeless problem, according to Gaar are addressed in Chapman's songs (Gaar, 1993, 369).

Tracy Chapman was born on March 30 1964 in Cleveland, Ohio. She was four years old when her parents, George and Hazel Winters Chapman, divorced. She lived with her mother and sister in Cleveland after the divorce. Chapman explains that her mother had an extensive record collection, to which she and her sister listened from a young age. Chapman had a keen interest in music and learned to play the ukulele in grade school and later the organ and clarinet. By the age of eight she was playing guitar and began writing songs (Jackson, 1996, 89). Her acute early interest and awareness of social issues is evident as at the age of fourteen she wrote "Cleveland 78", a song which encapsulated the news headlines at the time. Chapman explains in an interview that the song talked about the dangers of asbestos, and hit on the controversial comment politician Andrew Young made about Civil Rights protestors (Pond, 1988). She said in an interview with *Rolling Stone* in 1988: "as a child, I always had a sense of social conditions and political situations. I think it has to do with the fact that my mother was always discussing things with my sister and me ... also because I read a lot"

[1] This dissertation was submitted in partial fulfilment of the BA (Hons) in Digital Humanities, May 2019.

(Pond, 1988). This awareness and determination to address social issues through her music is a key theme throughout Chapman's career.

Chapman attained a scholarship to Wooster School in Danbury Connecticut. She describes getting this scholarship as a "lifesaving experience" as the Cleveland public school system where she previously attended school was in "shambles" because of the racial tensions and the teacher strikes. At the age of fourteen she found herself in the middle of a race riot and had a gun pointed at her. She feels that this was one of the reasons her mother allowed her to take the scholarship (Tracy Chapman Online, 2017). While attending school in Danbury she continued following her passion for music. Chapman performed at school functions and coffee houses at Wooster before graduating in 1982 (Jackson, 1996, 89). Chapman went on to Tufts University in Medford, Massachusetts, where she studied cultural anthropology which included African studies and ethnomusicology. This element of her academic career can be seen as the precursor to the themes and styles of her music. She played around Harvard Square and also on the Boston and Cambridge folk scene. A friend Brian Koppelman signed her to JBK after she graduated in 1986 and helped her get a record contract with Electra Records later that year (Jackson, 1996, 89). She produced her self-titled debut album with Electra which was released in 1988. The album contained eleven songs on the themes of love, politics and social issues. This album is the main case study of this dissertation. The next section will give an overview of the political and social issues of 1980s America which had an influence on the themes of the songs on Chapman's 1988 album.

During the 1970s and 1980s American politics became conservative. Conservatives were seeking cuts on property tax and less spending on social programs. However they were joined by radical religious groups who believed their duty was to inject their pro-life, traditional family beliefs into politics. Reagan ran for president alongside the conservatives and won (Norton, 1994, 1032). It was clear when he was voted in again in 1985 that there was a shift to the right as the opposing Democratic Party only had the backing of minority groups such as the unemployed, Hispanics, and African Americans (Norton, 1994, 1039). Under Reagan's terms as president, the Cold War came to an end, which validated his administration, despite his spending on military defences and neglect of domestic and social policies which led America into severe economic decline (Baptiste, 2004, 29). Reagan's new conservative government policies were to shape the economic and social downward spiral of the 1980s in America. Ethnic minorities, women, children and those on already low incomes were those to be most affected and neglected by the government during the 1980s. Daniel W. Rossides states that in the 1980 and 1984 presidential election only fifty-three percent of the eligible voters participated and in 1988 just over fifty percent voted (Rossides, 1993, 535). Many people became alienated from politics due to the popular belief that those in power were looking after their own interests. This is evident as poverty levels rose to that of the 1960s during the economic growth of the 1980s. Reagan's administration promoted the idea of the individual, emphasising that success was the sole responsibility of each person. During the 1980s the Civil Rights movement had ceased to make any ground, there was a short supply of houses in many American cities, family problems were pandemic, crime rates were soaring and the development of an underclass in America made up of an excessive amount of minorities was becoming apparent (Rossides, 1993, 536).

Studies carried out by the Urban Institute and the Congressional Budget Office in the early 1980s help explain why from 1980 to 1984 the gap between rich and poor significantly widened. Both studies found that the budget and tax policies that came into effect from 1980 hampered people on already low incomes by further reducing their incomes while increasing

the income of those wealthier households. Because black Americans made up a major portion of the low-income group they were heavily impacted (Ward, 1984, 26). The poverty rate in America was at thirteen percent in 1980; however it was thirty-three percent among African Americans which was over three times that among white Americans (Norton, 1994, 1040). A journalist for the *Washington Post* wrote in 2004 that he did not explicitly think Reagan was a racist however he did believe Reagan was indifferent "to the concerns of black Americans" (Baptiste, 2004, 29). During periods of major industrialisation there was a demand for an unskilled workforce, but from the 1970s the demand had shifted to that of an educated skilled workforce such as computer operators. Many blue-collar jobs were transferred out to the suburbs and out of the cities where many African Americans lived. Prospects for young black children were bleak. DelliCarpini wrote in 1994, that "an eighteen year old black male in 1993 is more likely to be in jail than college" (DelliCarpini, 1994, 233). His observations clearly show the lack of prospects for young black males in America during this period. Along with African Americans, women were among those most affected by governmental cutbacks. The US government's blindness to the level of poverty in America was obvious when Reagan's legal counsel Edwin Messe stated that there was "no authoritative evidence" that children in America went hungry, even though figures released by the House Select Committee on Children, Youth and Family in 1984 showed that one fifth of children in America lived in poverty, and for the black community it was one in every two. Furthermore the cuts directly affected children. Rents in subsidised housing for low-income families were raised, over two billion dollars was cut from the food stamp program and school lunch and breakfast programs were cut, which meant nearly three million fewer children received school lunches (Ward, 1984, 27).

Chapman questions this inequality in society and highlights the contradiction between war and peace in the direct and simplistic lyrics of the track "Why" from her 1988 album (Chapman, 1988). The song asks questions which it wants American society or the government to answer. This could be the reason Chapman uses a more popular rock style for this track, as rock music was popular among white audiences (Whiteley, 2000, 184). She asks questions like: "why do the babies starve?", and "why are the missiles called peacekeepers when they are aimed to kill?" in this song (Chapman, 1988). These lyrics clearly correlate with the governments overspend on the military and the cutbacks on food stamps, school lunch programs and general poverty in America during the 1980s.

Nonetheless, the black middle class was growing during this period and more black people were attending college. With equality becoming a reality for the upper part of black society there was a white backlash (Norton, 1994, 1041). It was the belief of many white Americans that the playing field had already been levelled. The Republican Party in the 1980s exploited these beliefs especially among the white community directly threatened by the economic and political gains made by black Americans (DelliCarpini, 1994, 233). A case was brought to the Supreme Court in 1979 on the grounds of reverse racism. Allan Bakke claimed that he did not get accepted to medical school, but a less qualified black person did to fill a quota and he maintained that this was unfair. The court ruled that racial quotas were unfair and Bakke won the case (Norton, 1994, 1041).

The levels of high unemployment and high inflation produced conditions that led to an upsurge in racism. Racist tensions ran high and the Ku Klux Klan saw an influx in members. Race riots began to break out on many cities across America such as Louisville and Boston, and colleges detailed a growing number of hate crimes against homosexuals, Jews and blacks on campus. The black community also became increasingly violent and tensions mounted in

the racist environment of 1980s America. In Miami riots lasted three days leaving eighteen dead and hundreds injured after an all-white jury declared the white defendant not guilty of a murder of a black person (Norton, 1994, 1041). On March 3, 1991, Rodney King, a black American man was arrested after allegedly resisting arrest after speeding. The arrest was caught on camera by a resident of the area and the footage showed the brutal attack which included between fifty-three and fifty-six blows from their batons, feet or fists, and repeated shocks from a stun gun. King sustained eleven broken bones including his eye socket bone. The footage was broadcast worldwide and for many black Americans this was proof of anti-black and Latino police brutality. Also the transcript which contained conversations of a racist nature recorded on monitored police radio prior and after the incident was published (Wright, 2009, 674). The media coverage of this highlighted the racist attitudes in America and the police brutality to a wide audience nationwide.

W. E. B. Du Bois, in his book *The Souls of Black Folk* stated that the "problem of the Twentieth Century is the problem of the colour-line" (Du Bois, 2013, 15). This thought is projected in Chapman's song "Across the Lines", from her self-titled debut album as she uses the geographic line of the train tracks to express this idea of the racial line: "...the tracks, separates whites from blacks" (Chapman, 1988). The lyrics emphasise the division that developed between white and black society during the period and paints a vivid picture of the race riots. The lyrics portray the volatile situation and the inevitable danger: "choose sides, or run for your life, tonight the riots begin" (Chapman, 1988). The snare drum tattoo that is recurrent through the song conveys a military tone (Whiteley, 2000, 178). The speed at which she sings some of the lyrics is expressive of the way stories are reported on or perhaps society's attitudes towards the riots. In the lyric "little black girl gets assaulted, no one knows her name", Chapman sings the word "black" fast and low so that it is almost inaudible. The idea that no one knows her name alludes to the fact that she was so insignificant that her name was not even given in the media reports. The verse goes on to state that she gets blamed for the riots that follow and ends with "Two black boys get killed, One white boy goes blind" (Chapman, 1988). Again in this line, the word "black" is almost whispered and the "white boy" is sung slow and clear. This could also reflect the social attitude or media coverage of such events and the emphasis on the violence perpetrated by black people and the ignorance to the racist violence against black Americans.

There was also a backlash against women during this period. Although women gained rights in regards to gaining bank loans, equal employment opportunity and the revision of the laws regarding evidence in rape cases, women were met with sharp opposition from anti-feminist groups. Many of these groups were part of the radical religious groups which lobbied for the traditional patriarchal values of male-led families and women to stay at home. They blamed women's pursuit of equality for the growing divorce rates in America (Norton, 1994, 1045-1046). In 1979 president Jimmy Carter acknowledged the need for a support service for victims of domestic abuse after the major problem of domestic violence was expressed before the US Civil Rights Commission the previous year. Carter set up the office of Domestic Violence within the Department of Health in 1979 and its function was to research the area, distribute preventative information and to financially help victims of domestic violence escape. However this was short-lived, as Reagan dissolved the Office of Domestic Violence in 1981. Instead the conservative New Right of Reagan's government promoted their traditional views of the family. They believed that this organisation was an invasion of the privacy of the family and it was assisting in taking women away from the home. Laws against domestic violence lost their importance and instead were connected to Child Abuse protection laws. Domestic violence was completely neglected as a political issue by the US

government for the duration of the 1980s until President Clinton signed in new legislation protecting women against violence in 1994 (Coleman, 2007, 264).

One of the most harrowing songs on Chapman's 1988 album is "Behind the Wall". It deals with the neglect of support systems for domestic violence victims and the inability of the police to intervene in what Chapman calls "domestic affairs" (Chapman, 1988). This song is sang *acapella*, which means with no music, this exaggerates the silence in America about domestic violence during the 1980s. The first verse is repeated twice and is about hearing screaming and 'loud voices behind the wall' (Chapman, 1988). The repetitive nature of the song represents the repetitive attacks that she hears next door. She states that calling the police is ineffective to stop the attack next door as the police either come late or not at all. This song expressed the crippling helplessness of victims of domestic violence as the lyrics state "tears well up" in the victim's eyes as the police state they cannot "intervene in domestic affairs" (Chapman, 1988). At the end of the song, the screams are followed by a chilling silence as the ambulance arrives, alluding to the idea that the woman has died. Similarly Chapman's track "Why" from the same album, which is discussed above, directly questions the US government on the lack of protection for women who suffer domestic violence: "Why is a woman still not safe when she's in her home". These two songs present Chapman's clear unease and discomfort with 1980s American policies on domestic violence.

As around one in every two marriages ended in divorce during this period, coupled with more and more teenage women and unmarried mothers having babies, there was a growing number children living in one parent family homes, usually with the mother (Norton, 1994, 1047). Many of these women were working mothers, but occupational segregation meant that women were still unlikely to achieve high paid positions. Coupled with the closing down of many factories during the downturn of the 1980s meant that many worked in low paid service jobs (Norton, 1994, 1047).

Chapman's hit single from her debut album "Fast Car" is reflective of the poverty trap many women, especially black women, experienced during this period (Chapman, 1988). The song addresses the real effects that the traditional role for women as a homemaker and carer has on females and how it keeps them trapped within poverty. The song is written in the first person and this creates a personal intimate feel. She tells a story of how her mother abandoned the family and she left school to take care of her alcoholic father. She has a dream of leaving this poverty-stricken life and leaving in her partner's "fast car" to start a new life. Disappointingly her hopes for a better life are less than fulfilled as her job just about pays the bills and the dream of promotion is short lived. The lack of jobs in America is also noted as her partner never finds a job and "stays out drinking late at the bar" (Chapman, 1988) while she is left to mind the children. Whiteley states that the sense of entrapment is also created by the repetitive two-bar guitar riff which also reflects the feeling of constraint (Whiteley, 200, 177).

A surge in social problems such as murders, drug use and crime rates, along with more school dropouts grew from the gaping inequities. Crack cocaine became the drug of choice among the poor communities emerging in New York City, perhaps as a means of escape from the hopelessness of their lives. It emerges as a major problem in New York's poorer communities, particularly among women in 1984. Children of drug addicts were neglected and many children became involved in gangs dealing with these drugs. Those involved in these gangs had access to machine guns and many innocent people were killed in the crossfire between these gang disputes, almost four hundred people were killed by gang violence in Los Angeles 1987 alone (Norton, 1994, 1073).

The Reagan and Bush administration's so called "get tough" agenda focused on street crime rather than organised white collar or domestic crime (Beckett, 2003, 73). Declining moral standards were what these administrations defined as the reason for a rise in street crime. However Reagan focused on drugs as the main contributor. Because Reagan and Bush defined the drug problem as criminal, rather than a social or public health problem, their means of tackling it was increased law enforcement rather than addressing the social issues such as job creation, health or educational programs. A 1989 poll ran by *New York Times/CBS News* shows that 64% identified drugs as the most significant problem in the United States. This is in stark comparison to that of 3% in the1986 poll (Beckett, 2003, 73). This clearly shows that towards the end of the 1980s the drug problem in America had become substantially greater, possibly due to the government social policies during this period, and their neglect of marginalised communities.

Chapman's politicised lyrics continued on to her following albums. Her song 'Bang Bang Bang' from her third album *Matters of the Heart* released in 1992 deals with the gun and drug crime in America and the US government's response to it. The lyrics again are directed at the government and society, asking "what you go and do", suggesting that they are responsible for the gun crime: "you go and give a boy a gun" (Chapman, 1992). She is suggesting that the crime levels are due to the lives these young boys are born into and the political neglect of these areas. The lyric "he wants the chances that you took from him and nothing that you own" (Chapman, 1992) is suggestive that the reason these young men turn to crime is that they have no other opportunities in America. The song powerfully hits on the police brutality against black people such as the Rodney King case of 1992, as the lyrics read "if he comes for you or me, and we can place a gun in his hand, bang, bang, bang we'll shoot him down" (Chapman, 1992). It also suggests that the government is not concerned about murders and crime in the black ghettos, they are only concerned if it affects white society. The lyrics: "If he preys only on his neighbours … we will consider it a favour" clearly demonstrate this (Chapman, 1992).

The American government's engagement with the apartheid movement was disastrous. Around one and a half million people died from apartheid government attacks in surrounding countries that sheltered anti-apartheid groups. Reagan's comments to *CBS* in 1981 expose his interests in South Africa as being fiscal and having little regard for humanitarian rights: "a country that, strategically, is essential to the free world and its production of minerals" (Baptiste, 2004, 30). America's apathy towards the situation in South Africa is contrasted with Tracy Chapman's involvement. Three months after the release of Tracy Chapman's debut album she performed at *Nelson Mandela Freedom Fest* to an audience of millions. In September 1988 she headlined *Amnesty International's Global Human Rights Now!*Tour with Bruce Springsteen, Peter Gabriel and Sting (Jackson, 1996, 88). Goodman writing in *Rolling Stone* believes that the reason "Chapman could move such a broad audience on the strength of one album is testimony to the power of her vision and clarity of style" (Jackson, 1996, 88). This shows Chapman's huge popularity worldwide as she played to such a big audience so early in her career. The following section will give an overview of the main genres of music popular in the period and asses their influence on the development of Chapman's music.

Chapman's music reflects and differs from other genres popular in the period. She adopts the very practical style of protest seen in rap music at the time. Black rap music came to prominence in the late 1970s. By the 1980s it became evident that rap had become a platform for political and social protest addressing racism and racial poverty and highlighting life in

the ghettos (Whiteley, 2000, 175). The Grandmaster Flash song "The Message" talks about the deprivation in American Ghettos: "rats in the front room, roaches in the back". The lyrics express the rising tensions experienced by living in such conditions: "don't push me 'cause I'm close to the edge" (Grandmaster Flash, 1982). Rap music was not always empowering, especially for women and often has misogynistic tones. Rap artist Kanye West suggests that this is because "lack of opportunities" black men have and the emasculation they feel because of this, which they take out on women (Mokoena, 2015). Although Chapman's themes highlight social conditions in a similar way to rap, she does not adopt any other aspects of the rap genre. In a 1988 interview, Tracy Chapman was asked if she viewed herself as a folk artist and she answered that her music is a "combination of the black and white folk traditions". She further explains that people view folk music in terms of a white tradition of Anglo-American influence and forget that the folk sound has its roots in black musical traditions (Decurtis, 1988). To explore this statement, the following section will examine both the black and white folk music traditions in America and how they translate into Chapman's music.

In the 1980s, a group of female singer-songwriters of a folk style re-emerged in the charts such as Suzanne Vega and Sinead O'Connor that countered the more commercial pop music and rap that dominated the charts. Tracy Chapman was one of these female artists whose songs hit on social issues along with personal experiences. Chapman's songs were the closest in style to that of the Folk revival of the 1960s both in terms of her use of the acoustic sound of her debut album and the powerful lyrics that comment on social issues and conditions (Weissman, 2006, 225). John Milward, a critic for *Mademoiselle* magazine, credited Chapman along with other new female songwriters such as Toni Childs, Natalie Merchant and Suzanne Vega with beginning a "mini-revolution" among female singer-songwriters (Jackson, 1996, 88). Chapman adapts the traditional stance of 1960 Folk music to suit a very 1980s demand and writes about romantic relationships as well as political issues. Chapman's music is very personal, very emotional even when it quietly rages over poverty (Jackson, 1996, 88). Chapman admits that she grew up in a house that was always full of music, and she loved to listen to her mother's record collection. She sites Betty Wright, gospel singer Mahalia Jackson and Marvin Gaye as some of the artists she listened to growing up (Decurtis, 1988). Marvin Gaye's 1971 album *What's Going On*, had clear anti-war tones and reflected the rising political consciousness of the late 1960s among Black Americans (Firth, 2001, 87). Her interest in Marvin Gaye demonstrates her early interest in political themed music.

There was growing unrest in America during the 1960s and 1970s. During the Civil Rights era, folk music became the vehicle for expressing the anti-establishment sentiment and highlighting the inequality in America. Frank Zappa captured the attitude of the time when he said that young people had no loyalty to "flag, country or doctrine, but only to music" (Rodinitzky, 1999, 105). The youth across America began to view genres such as jazz as nonsensical and meaningless, and rather embraced the integrity and protest nature of folk music (Rodinitzky, 1999, 105). American folk music has been heavily influenced by the songs sung by Black slaves brought from Africa such as spirituals, which developed through gospel and blues. Irish, Scottish and English style of folk music also influenced popular folk music in America (Warner, 1996, 255).

The song "We Shall Overcome" by Pete Seeger sung at many sit-ins and protests across America had become the most iconic song of the 1960s and 1970s era. Artists like Phil Ochs and Bob Dylan wrote songs that broadly commented on social inequality and war (Rodinitzky, 1999, 105-106). Bob Dylan wrote songs specifically against racial

discrimination such as "Oxford Town" written in 1963 song about race riots in Oxford Mississippi after the first black man in America attended college, and his 1976 song "Hurricane" which comments on racial profiling which led to a Black boxer, Ruben Carter, being falsely convicted of murder. By the late 1960s Dylan swapped the acoustic guitar for an electric one and merged the protest folk song with a rock sound which exudes a head-on opposition to white middle-class America (Rodinitzky, 1999, 110). This folk-rock scene of the 1970s was dominated by singer-songwriters such as James Taylor and Joni Mitchell (Warner, 1996, 256). Wayne Wadhams identifies the themes of coming change and the growing generational gap in Tracy Chapman's 1988 debut album and states that Chapman is continuing along the same thread as tracks such as Bob Dylan's "Times They Are A-Changin" and Simon & Garfunkel's "The Sound of Silence" (Wadhams, 2001, 148). Although Chapman's songs are linked to the folk-rock scene of the late 1960s and 1970s by their strong vocal sound, compelling lyrics and often biting social message, Chapman is difficult to categorise (Jackson, 1996, 88). Her Hit "Talkin' 'Bout a Revolution" is a prime example of Chapman's folk protest style. It identifies with the disadvantaged and the rising tensions in America among the marginalised "poor people gonna rise up, and get their share" (Chapman, 1988). It paints a clear picture of the poverty as people are: "standing in the welfare lines, crying on the doorsteps of the armies of salvation" (Chapman, 1988). It has a repetitive chord progression of G, C, Em to D which connects it to the Folk genre. The bass line which begins in the second verse follows the same chords with a slight variation and builds the rhythm and speed of the song to the chorus where Chapman's vocals are sung at the top of her range creating a sense of urgency (Whiteley, 2000, 176). The lyrics "you better, run, run, run..." adds to the feeling of rising tensions. It ends with a tone of social change and revolution: "finally the tables are starting to turn, talk about a revolution" (Chapman, 1988). This song demonstrates her link with the white American folk tradition through her lyrics that highlight the rising need for social change and the simple acoustic chord progression. Black Americans have used vernacular art forms to express their history and their view of the world. Toni Morrison has argued that this black vernacular art has contributed to the lasting strength of black consciousness (O'Meally, 2014, 4). James Weldon Johnson states that the only creative things to come out of America were created by the Negro. He names the Uncle Remus stories, the "spirituals" and the Cakewalk (which is a dance) and Ragtime music as the creative art forms that emerged from African American society (Johnson, 1922). The commonality of all these arts created by African Americans is that they are communal in nature. They return to a shared history and themes which are recognised and understood across the black community. Black author Toni Morrison as talked about her use of cultural memory in her writing and this is a characteristic used in many black texts (Roy, 2010). Chapman's use of music as a medium to express her dissatisfaction of the social and political situation is in tune with the black tradition of folk music. Also her use of cultural memory and the spirituals themes of escape are seen in her song "She'd Got her Ticket" (Chapman, 1988).

Spirituals were songs sung by African Americans slaves in America. These songs had religious themes, but were not only sung in church; rather they were part of their everyday lives. Some of the spirituals expressed the idea of escape: "I've got two wings for to fly away" (O'Meally, 2014, 11). Frederick Douglass reflects on the Negro spirituals that were sung in the field and the collective pain and sorrow they expressed in his book *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, an American Slave*. He states that "the songs of the slaves represent the sorrows of his heart" (Douglass, 1849, 13). The secular songs sung by Black slaves also served much the same purpose as the spirituals and many of these songs were narratives (O'Meally, 2014, 4). Chapman's deep tone and the use of melisma (singing one

syllable in more than one note), emphasises the sorrow and pain in her songs (Whiteley, 2000, 175). The track "She's Got Her Ticket" on Chapman's self-titled debut album (Chapman, 1988) reflects this theme of escape. The song is about a young girl who wants to leave the "hatred and corruption" and go to a place in the sun. It is reminiscent of the slaves wanting to escape the oppressive hatred of their owners. Chapman uses her cultural memory and makes it relevant to the contemporary social situation. The lyrics are repeated "and she'll fly, fly, fly...." which is reflective of the escape theme of many spirituals (Chapman, 1988).The song reflects the longing to escape 'the corruption and greed' of America where the "young girl ain't got no chances". Here Chapman makes use of her cultural memory of the corruption of slave owners and the need to escape. The early black music was also influenced by European musical styles such as gospel and spirituals, developed into blues, reggae and also rap (Whiteley, 2000, 189). The style of "She's Got Her Ticket" is reggae and told in a story like fashion. Reggae reflects a mixed Caribbean African and colonial style and emerged from the American R&B sound, which itself branches from African-American blues. Reggae became synonymous with cultural resistance and connected to African roots (Whiteley, 2000, 184). Chapman's use of reggae in this song is notable because it corresponds with the lyrics "place in the sun", and "roots" (Chapman, 1988).

Although Chapman had a passion for music she did not choose to have song lyrics run alongside her yearbook photograph as most other students did, rather she selected the words of poet Nikki Giovanni (Pond, 1988). Using a passage from a black poet with feminist views as her yearbook statement demonstrates that Chapman had already associated herself with an activist, feminist stance before she even left college. Many of the prominent female folk singers of the 1960s such as Joan Baez and Judy Collins did not specifically identify with the Feminist movement of the time; however their songs were often about independent assertive women. By the 1970s feminist singers such as Holly Near wrote songs that reflected the diverse feminist issues women faced. In 1973 a bluegrass album by Hazel Dickens and Alice Gerard had a working-class slant and themes such as family and rural life. Women's music in the 1970s began to stress the oppression that women suffered under Capitalism (Rodinitzky, 1999, 116). Parallel to this was the beginning of the Second Wave Feminists movement, fighting for reform of women's rights and many female writers such as Toni Morrison and Alice Walker wrote about real issues that women faced. The National Organisation for Women (NOW) was established in the 1960s and promoted equality for all women in America. Members of NOW included feminist academics and writers such as Alice Rossi and Betty Friedan (Cott, 2006, viii). Alice Walker a Black American writer born in 1944 is among the many Feminist writers of the 1970s and 1980s writing about personal odysseys and the wider female experience. She published a set of poems in 1968 which were about her personal experience of an unplanned pregnancy and abortion when in college (Love, 2006, 475). In her book *In Search of our Mothers Garden*, she introduces the term "womanist". She describes a womanist as a feminist of colour. She states that a womanist does not accept the assigned position as a server for men, to be silent or racial categories. A womanist loves women's culture and loves "the folk" (Wright, 2009, 628-629). She too, like Alice Walker writes about personal experience and also about the wider female experience.

Tracy Chapman has been labelled as a protest singer, a folk singer and an urban folk singer but her repertoire is much broader ranging from rhythm and blues, rock, reggae, and pop to blues and folk (Jackson, 1996, 88). She had demonstrated her willingness to address social and political, economic, feminist and racial issues in the range of songs discussed in this dissertation and at the very least she has raised awareness of these issues. When asked in an interview whether music can change the world, Chapman replied: "it's people that make the

changes, the music itself and be a catalyst, it can be provocative, it can be educational, but ultimately it is what people do with all the feelings and thoughts that they have that change the world" (Tracy Chapman Online, 2012). Although Chapman did not deliberately set out to be a protest singer, her music has highlighted the many problems within American society and politics to an international audience. It may not have made any direct changes, although it raised awareness of these issues. As this dissertation has argued, Chapman draws upon her social consciousness and the feminist literary tradition, coupled with black musical tradition and protest folk genre in creating her music which results in an extremely personal, emotional and poetic sound which became the voice of 1980s America.

Bibliography

CDs:

Grandmaster Flash and the Furious Five, (1982), *The Message*, [CD] Producer: Edward G. Fletcher and Sylvia Robinson.

Chapman, T. (1988). *Tracy Chapman*, [CD] Producer: Powertrax California.

Chapman, T. (1992). 'Bang Bang Bang', *Matters of the Heart*, [CD] Producer: Tracy Chapman and Jimmy Love.

Books

Beckett, K. (2003). 'Setting the Public agenda: "Street Crime" and Drug Use in American Politics', in J.D. Orcutt and D.R. Rudy, eds., *Drugs, Alcohol, and Social Problems*, USA: Rowan & Littlefield Publishers, Inc. 71-92.

Cott, N.F. (2006). 'Foreword', in B.J. Love, ed., *Feminists Who Changed America 1963-1975*, USA: University of Illinois Press.

DelliCarpini, M. X. (1994). 'The Making of Consensual Majority: Political discourse and Electoral Politics in the 1980's', in ed. Michael Klein, *An American Half Century, Post-war culture and Politics in the USA*, London: Pluto Press, 233.

Dines, G. And Humez, J.M. (2015). *Gender, Race and Class in Media*, USA: Sage Publications.

Eyerman, R. and Jamison, A. (1998). *Music and Social Movements: Mobilizing Traditions in the Twentieth Century*, UK: Cambridge University Press.

Firth, S., Straw, W. and Street, J. (2001). 'Star Profiles', *The Cambridge Companion to Pop and Rock*, UK: Cambridge University Press, 74-89.

Gates H. L. (2014). *The Norton Anthology of African American Literature*, New York: N. N. Norton & Company.

Jackson, J.K. (1996). 'Tracy Chapman', in J. Carney Smyth and S. Phelps, eds., *Notable Black American Women Book 2*, USA: Gale Research Inc. 88-90.

Johnson, J.W. (1922). 'Preface', *The Book of American Negro Poetry*, Kindle.

Love, B.J. (2006).*Feminists Who Changed America 1963-1975*, USA: University of Illinois Press, 475.

Coleman, M., Ganong, L.H. and Warzinik, K. (2007). 'Family Abuse and Neglect: The Dark Side of Families', *Family Life in the 20th-century America*, London: Greenwood Press, 241-274.

Norton, M.B., Katzman, D.M., Escott, P.D., Chudacoff, H.P., Paterson, T.G. and Tuttle, W. M. (1994). 'A Turn to the Right, 1974-1989', *A History of the United States, A People & Nation, Fourth Edition*, USA: Houghton Mifflin, 1023-1058.

O'Meally, R.G. (2014). 'The Vernacular Tradition', in H.L. Gates, Jr. and V. Smith, eds., *Norton of African American Literature Third Edition Anthology*, New York: W. W. Norton & Company, Inc.

Rampersao, A. (2001). *The Collected Works of Langston Hughes; the Poems, 1951-1967*, London: University of Missouri Press, 5.

Rossides, D.W. (1993). 'American Society as problem Solver', *American Society, an Introduction to Macrosociology*, New York: General Hall, Inc. 527-562

Roy, W. G. (2010). *Reds, Whites, and Blues: Social Movements Folk Music, and Race in the United States*, Oxford: Princeton University Press

Shaw, S.J. (2013). *W.E.B. du Bois and the Souls of Black Folk*, USA: University of North Carolina Press, 15, [online] available: ProQuest Ebook Central [11 October 2018]

Stokes, M. (1997). *Ethnicity, Identity and Music, The Musical Construction of Place*, New York: Berg Publishers.

Wadhams, W. (2001). 'Jewels in the Crown, Nails in the Coffin', *Inside The Hits*, USA: Berklee Press, 142 – 168

Ward, M. (1984). 'Impact of Federal Budget and Tax Policies on Black Americans', *The Crisis, a Profile of Black America*, 91, 10, New York: Crisis Publishing Company, Inc.

Warner, S. (1996). 'Doing things in Style: The Genres of Rock', *Rockspeak! The language of Rock and Pop*, United Kingdom: Blandford, 247-271

Weissman, D. (2006). 'Roots and Branches, Part Two: Ethnicity', *Which Side Are You On? An Inside History of the Folk Music Revival in America*, New York: Continuum International, 219-243

Weissman, D. (2006). 'The Seventies: singer-songwriters and women's music- The revival transformed', *Which Side Are You On? An Inside History of the Folk Music Revival in America*, New York: Continuum International, 178-193.

Weissman, D. (2010). *Talkin' 'Bout a Revolution: Music and Social Change in America*, Canada: Backbeat Books.

Whiteley, S. (2000). 'Talkin' 'Bout a Revolution', *Women and Popular Music, Sexuality, Identity and Subjectivity*, New York: Routledge, 171-195.

Wright, K. (2009). 'Learning to Talk of Race: The Modern Era', *The African-American Experience*, New York: Black Dog & Leventhal Publishers, Inc. 628-629.

Webography:

Mike Amore. (2015). 'Tracy Chapman - Sunrise Feature - Mike Amor', *Youtube* [online video] available: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=q76MYzT4enw&t=184s [accessed 11 October 2018]

Tracy Chapman (2015). 'Tracy Chapman - "Fast Car" (Official Music Video)', *Youtube*, [online video] available: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AIOAlaACuv4 [accessed 6 November 2018]

Tracy Chapman Online. (2012). 'Tracy Chapman interview', *Youtube* [online video] available: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sweSlbRGvqQ [accessed 11 October 2018]

Young, Gary. (2002). 'A Militant Mellows', *The Guardian International Edition* [online] available; https://www.theguardian.com/music/2002/sep/28/artsfeatures.popandrock [accessed 20 October 2018]

Baptiste, H.P., Orvosh-Kamenski, H. and Kamenski, C. J. (2004) 'American Presidents and Their Attitudes, Beliefs, and Actions Surrounding Education and Multiculturalism: A Series of Research Studies in Educational Policy. Fifth Instalment -- Examining Presidents Thomas Jefferson, Abraham Lincoln, and Lyndon B. Johnson', *Multicultural Education*, 12, 2, pp. 34–47. [online] Available:
https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&AuthType=sso,cpid&custid=ns000798&db=eric&AN=EJ781919&site=eds-live [Accessed: 22 February 2019].

Decurtis, A. (1988). 'Tracy Chapman's Black and White World, A powerful new voice sings out about racism and poverty', *Rolling Stone* [online] available: https://www.rollingstone.com/music/music-news/tracy-chapmans-black-and-white-world-75878 [accessed 20 March 2019]

Douglass, F. (1849). *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, an American Slave*, Boston: Anti-Slavery Office, [online] available: https://books.google.ie/books/about/Narrative_of_the_Life_of_Frederick_Dougl.html?id=spM-AQAAMAAJ&printsec=frontcover&source=kp_read_button&redir_esc=y#v=onepage&q=song&f=false [accessed 1 April 2019]

Mokoena, T. (2015). 'Kanye West: 'Generally rap is Misogynistic', *The Guardian*, [online] available: https://www.theguardian.com/music/2015/oct/06/kanye-west-showstudio-interview-rap-is-misogynistic [accessed 20 April 2019].

Pond, S. (1988). 'Tracy Chapman: On Her Own Terms', *Rolling Stone*, [online] available: https://www.rollingstone.com/music/music-news/tracy-chapman-on-her-own-terms-60993/ [accessed 3 March 2019]

Rodnitzky, J. L. (1999) 'The Sixties between the Microgrooves: Using Folk and Protest Music to Understand American History, 1963-1973', *Popular Music & Society*, 23, 4, pp. 105–122. Available at: http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&AuthType=sso,cpid&custid=ns000798&db=a9h&AN=4024048&site=eds-live [Accessed: 31 October 2018].

Documentaries

Lindsay, D. and Martin T.J, (2017) LA 92, *Netflix*, USA: National Geographic.