The Black Arts Movement in America and its Influence on Contemporary Rap Music Today: A Case Study on Kendrick Lamar

Clodagh Hand[1]

In April 2018, rap artist Kendrick Lamar won the Pulitzer Prize for his album DAMN (Gray, 2018). This made him the first ever non-jazz or classical artist to win the prize (Gray, 2018). The Pulitzer Prize board calls Lamar's music: "a virtuosic song collection unified by its vernacular authenticity and rhythmic dynamism that offers affecting vignettes, capturing the complexity of modern African American Life" (Gray, 2018). This award is a sign of the literacy quality, as well as the relevance of political critique of rap music, that Lamar's work has to offer. It is suggested that rap music is deep-rooted in African American Culture and is heavily influenced by the works of the Black Arts Movement during the 1960s in America (Ramsey, 2004, 165). This dissertation will argue that the work of contemporary rap artist Kendrick Lamar is directly connected to the texts of the Black Arts, written almost sixty years ago. To argue this, the dissertation will begin with an introduction to the Black Arts Movement and why it was established. Two of the founders of the movement will then be discussed, along with their founding texts of the Black Arts. These are "The Revolutionary Theatre" by Amiri Baraka and "The Black Arts Movement" by Larry Neal. These texts should make clear to the reader, what some of the main aims, themes and style of the Black Arts texts were. The dissertation will then look at the origins of hip-hop culture in America, focusing specifically on rap music. After the link between the Black Arts and rap music is established, Lamar will then be examined as a case study and it will be argued that his music embodies many of the themes, aims and style of the literature of the Black Arts.

Despite the efforts of the Civil Rights Movement in America to break the social, political and economic barrier between the white and black community, during the mid-1960s more and more black people began to favour Black Nationalism and called for a more aggressive form of protest to meet the wants and needs of black Americans (Riches, 2010, pp. 7-8). Black Nationalism is an ideology whereby black people feel that they are their own separate nation and thus, distance themselves from white people (Miah, 2018, 3). From Black Nationalism, comes the term Black Power, advocated by self-proclaimed Black Nationalist Malcom X, who felt that 1960s America did not represent black people and therefore, blacks needed to take action and form their own sense of a nation (Miah, 2018, 3). The attempt to distance black people from white people in America resulted in the formation of the Black Power movement and its military wing, the Black Panthers, both of which will be discussed later in the essay. Following on from the tensions and further segregation that remained between the white and black community during the Civil Rights Movement, many black people felt the need to establish their own unique voice within their community, whereby they would be free to express their thoughts and feelings. This was to be done through the establishment of the Black Arts Movement.

The Black Arts Movement (B.A.M) was the name given to a group of politically motivated black poets, dramatists, musicians and writers who emerged in the wake of the Black Power Movement (Hine, 2013, n.p). The movement was established in 1965 by the writer Amiri Baraka. Baraka was one of the most influential black writers of his time and remains a celebrated poet, music critic and playwright (Andrews et al, 1997, n.p). Amiri Baraka, born LeRoi Jones, was a Beat Poet in Greenwich Village, where he lived with his white, Jewish wife and children (Keleta-Mae, 2016, 268). During the 1950s, he was

[1] This dissertation was submitted in partial fulfilment of the BA(Hons) in Digital Humanities, May 2018.

interested in "the beauty of poetry" (Davidson, 2003, 404), however this soon changed as the divide between black and white America grew stronger as the Civil Rights Movement began to fail. After the assassination of Malcom X in 1965, he developed a new meaning of what poetry should aim to achieve, claiming that it must be "close to the ground" in terms of its political message (Keleta-Mae, 2016, 268). It became clear to him that he possessed "an angst that did not fit into the Bohemian paradigm" (Davidson, 2003, 400). He then decided to give up his middle class lifestyle by abandoning his family and moving to Harlem, New York, where he opened the Black Arts Repertory Theatre/ School (BARTS). He further reclaimed his blackness by changing his name to Amiri Baraka and working closely with black writers who also felt frustrated with both the oppression of the black community by the white hegemony, as well as those in the black community who follow the hegemonic values of the white community and lost touch with their blackness (Davidson, 2003, 401). It was from this point onwards that Baraka declared himself a "black cultural nationalist" (Keleta-Mae, 2016, 268) and founded the Black Arts Movement, with the aim of developing a revolutionary art that was identifiably black and expressed the issues and concerns of black culture (Davidson, 2003, 404).

The aim of the BARTS was to promote the expression and works of black literary artists (Andrews et al, 1997, n.p). This not only gave black writers their own freedom of expression, but allowed for them to comment politically on the lives of the black community and issues surrounding racism that remained prominent in America during this time. Young black writers such as Steve Cannon, Lenox Raphael, Askia M Touré, Sonia Sanches and Marvin X joined BARTS and began to publish respected works (Andrews et al, 1997, n.p). Magazines such as *Umbra*, *Liberator* and *Freedomways* were among the first to offer publishing opportunities for these young black writers and before long, their work became available to the black community in the form of print media (Andrews et al, 1997, n.p).

One of the main criticisms of the Black Arts Movement is its link with Black Power and furthermore, its assertion of violence. The 1960s was a decade of immense frustration and anger among the black community, following the assassination of two major black activists: Martin Luther King and Malcom X. The latter of the two was heavily involved with the concept of Black Power. Malcom X was a black activist who involved himself with the practices of the Nation of Islam, using Black Muslim ideas of the 1950s to bring together all black people. He believed that a God, Allah, had created all men black, however an evil chemist created the white race in order to torment black people (Riches, 2010, 86). He claimed that it was therefore the duty of black people to come together and better themselves, rising above the white community and ceasing any integration between the two (Peniel, 2011, B6-B9). The Black Power Movement shifted from the ideas of the Civil Rights Movement which embodies equality between both communities and instead concentrated on the institutional racism that remained in areas such as housing, healthcare, education and criminal justice (Kirk, 2016, 207). As well as this, the Black Power Movement was in favour of violence "when deemed necessary" (Kirk, 2016, 207). Groups that began to emerge from the concept of Black Power included the Black Panther Party, founded by Bobby Seale and Huey Newton. This was a militant group who attempted to combat police brutality toward black communities (Kirk, 2016, 207). After the assassination of Malcom X, Baraka abandoned his wife and children and moved to Harlem to create a change within the black community, by opening the BARTS (Matlin, 2006, 96). It was said that he had gained inspiration from the Black Power Movement (Matlin, 2006, 96). Following the 1967 New York riots that resulted in black citizens of Newark engaging in riots toward white policemen for their acts of unjust police brutality, Baraka too engaged in violent protests where he showed his anger and frustration towards "a white America that was prosperous and a black America that was under-privileged" (Colemen, 2017, 1). Police brutality was at the time, very prominent

toward the black community and it becomes apparent that some ideas of Black Power are touched upon in the works of the Black Arts, whereby black artists should not be afraid to shock the reader and defend their culture, as well as segregating themselves from the white community. This is evident in two of the founding texts of the Black Arts Movement.

Now considered one of the founding texts of the Black Arts Movement, Baraka's essay "The Revolutionary Theatre" was not initially received well by critics and publishers. Baraka's text was at first rejected by the *New York Times* magazine, as well as *The Village Voice* (Boyd, 2014). These were both publications that were owned and controlled by white Americans. The publishers of such magazines claimed that they "did not understand" the nature of the text (Boyd, 2014) and therefore, it was denied publication. It was then however, published in the *Liberator* magazine, which showcased the works of black artists (Andrews et al, 1997, n.p).

"The Revolutionary Theatre" had a list of clear aims to be considered by both the writer and the reader. Firstly, the establishment of BARTS aimed to "force change" (Baraka, 1965, 1). This was to be achieved by black artists remaining true to their own culture and remaining political in their writing: "it is a political theatre, a weapon to help in the slaughter of these dim-witted fat-bellied white guys who somehow believe that the rest of the world is here for them to slobber on" (Baraka, 1965, 2). Here, Baraka encourages black writers to expose white hegemony. This refers to white people being privileged in all aspects of American society and, therefore, having a set of ideologies that control and undermine the black community.

"The Revolutionary Theatre" also emphasises the importance for the B.A.M to be anti-Western in its approach (Baraka, 1965, 2). This refers to the need for black writers to reject the false ideologies of the Western hero that white society constantly reinforces within literature. Baraka also mentions the likely outcome of the movement, whereby white society will reject and critique the works of black writers. He claims that: "white man will cower before this theatre because it hates them. Because they have been trained to hate. The Revolutionary Theatre will hate them for hating" (Baraka, 1965, 1). This is a necessary outcome, according to Baraka, as given that this was written during 1960s America, the freedom of truth and expression among black writers would naturally be condemned and silenced by white people. This also links with the philosophy of Black Power, in relation to black people segregating themselves from white ideology and building a separate community where they are free to express their anger.

Baraka emphasises the power of Black Arts texts to shock the reader. Black Arts texts must be emotional, honest and striking. He says: "what we show must cause the blood to rush, so that pre-revolutionary temperaments will be bathed in this blood, and it will cause their deepest souls to move" (Baraka, 1965, 2). This relates to producing texts that deal with the historical oppression of black people and voicing the shared hatred toward the white oppressors. Texts must be honest and portray black people as victims (Baraka, 1965, 2). By doing so, Baraka claims that the BARTS will help create a sense of brotherhood within the black community: "Our theatre will show victims so that their brothers in the audience will be better able to understand that they are the brothers of victims, if they are blood brothers" (Baraka, 1965, 2). He finishes the essay by coming to terms with the likely outcome of the BARTS, whereby white institutions will fight to silence the works of black writers (Baraka, 1965, 3). This is expected, however Baraka draws on the importance of black writers to fight back with the power of the truth within their work, stating that: "The force we want is of twenty million spooks storming America with furious cries and unstoppable weapons. We want explosions" (Baraka, 1965, 3).

"The Revolutionary Theatre" is said to have been "essential to the evolution of the Black Arts ethos" (Nash, 2017, 1). Nash claims that there was a great deal of rebellion and

revolution in Baraka's work (Nash, 2017, 4). The way in which he used language was said to have "explicitly rejected white domination", by gaining creative and communal freedom in his striking language (Nash, 2017, 4). While Baraka's work was widely received and accepted by black audiences, there was however a backlash against the formation of the Black Aesthetic. During the 1970s, a small, but "active" group of black writers aimed to dismantle some of the claims of the Black Arts made by Baraka, claiming that the principles of the Black Aesthetic described by Baraka and other writers of the Black Arts were simply "too prescriptive and narrowly political" (Nash, 2017, 7). This group of black writers ate referred to as The New Breed and include writers such as Ishmael Reed and Al Young (Nash, 2017, 7). Despite this backlash, the themes of the Black Aesthetic are still found in African American literature today (Nash, 2017, 8).

Larry Neal was another important figure in the Black Arts Movement, and was described: "a dynamic and powerful spokesperson for the African American community" by Gates and McKay (Neal, 2004, 2038). Along with Baraka, Neal's works played a role in creating the black avant-garde model that found its way into American culture (Smethrust, 2003, 262). Neal also coined some of the main expectations associated with the texts that were to be produced during the Black Arts Movement. He too saw America as being divided between a privileged white community and an oppressed black community (Neal, 2004, 2039). Neal, like Baraka, depended on the literature of the Black Arts to destroy the Western ideology, stating it must be "either radicalized or destroyed" (Neal, 2004, 2039).

To do so, the literature of the movement, according to Neal, must implement the use of "Black Aesthetic". This again relates to black writers capturing the cultural traditions of African Americans and speaking on behalf of the black community (Neal, 2004, 2040). By allowing black writers to focus on the roots of their oppression and come to terms with their historical background, they will create a whole new meaning of black liberation, asking the question: "whose vision of the world is finally more meaningful, ours or the white oppressors?" (Neal, 2004, 2040). As well as this, Neal thinks that black writers should not be afraid to write about the brutal sufferings of their ancestors, as this should strengthen the black community as a whole. He says that: "history, like the blues, demands that we witness the painful events of our prior lives; and that we either confront these painful events or be destroyed by them" (Neal, 2004, 2047). Another one of the main aims of the Black Arts was to avoid what Neal describes as "protest literature" (Neal, 2004, 2040). Protest literature refers to black writers trying to appeal to a white audience in order to gain sympathy from them (Neal, 2004, 2040). Avoiding the traditional white, Western demands of protest literature allows for black writers to express their anger and frustration that has stemmed from the oppression of white America. He states that: "to accept the white aesthetic is to accept and validate a society that will not allow him to live […] we must create new songs, new history, new symbols, new legends" (Neal, 2004, 2040). Another common theme of the Black Arts texts according to Neal, is the tension that occurs not only between the white and black community, but the internal tensions within the black community, particularly the relationship between men and women (Neal, 2004, 2048). A lot of male figures in the Black Arts texts often display acts of violence toward black women. This can be seen as double oppression, whereby the man directs his anger and frustration toward his family, because he himself feels oppressed by white society and therefore only has the ability to act internally (Neal, 2004, 2048). This refers to black men displaying acts of violence towards members of the black community and often their own family, as they feel overpowered by the hegemony of white America. Sometimes, the only way for a black man to feel powerful, is to further oppress members of the black community. This is addressed by Neal. He says: "unable to direct his violence against the oppressor, the Black man becomes more frustrated and the sense of powerlessness deepens. Lacking the strength to be a man in the white world, he turns

against the family" (Neal, 2004, 2048). This type of violence was relevant during the 1060s, as the previous image of the "Christian, strong Black mother" weakened as black men fought for their voice in society (Neal, 2004, 2049).

Both Neal and Baraka justify the need for violence within the literature of black writers. Baraka states that: "we will scream and cry, murder, run through the streets in agony, if it means some soul will be moved" (Baraka, 1965, 2). Similarly, Neal claims that black texts must draw upon the "physical entities: fists, daggers, airplane poems, and poems that shoot guns" (Neal, 2004, 2041). Both texts are angry in tone and shocking in their delivery. This is done to help black people engage with the text and create that Neal calls a "personal force" (Neal, 2004, 2041), whereby the reader can respond to the text more emotionally after coming to terms with the severity of their oppression. This idea links with the philosophy of Black Power, as Malcom X saw violence as a necessary driving force for the liberation of black people (Neal, 2004, 2042).

Overall, Neal's essay is widely valued among black writers. It is said to have: "marked an important era in the evolution of African American artistry, a moment where black writers, artists and musicians forged their own declarations of independence from white America" (Nash, 2017, 1). "The Black Arts Movement", however, much like the work of Baraka, also received some criticism. Some young black writers, such as The New Breed, also found Neal's aims in relation to the role of the Black Arts to value essentialism and instead, aimed to "articulate a more sweeping, multi-faced understanding of racial identity" in their literary works (Nash, 2017, 1). Nonetheless, Nash suggests that the efforts of Neal and Baraka paved the way in the evolution of African American literature and even goes as far as suggesting that were it not for their efforts, African American literature could not have evolved in the way that it has (Nash, 2017, 8).

Many of the themes, aims and style of the Black Arts during the 1960s and 1970s were echoed during the 1980s, in a number of newly emerging genres of black texts. During the late 1970s, a new style of poetry surfaced. This poetry became known as spoken word poetry (Johnson, 2017, 3). Many poets began to perform their works in various public spaces including coffee shops, bars, record stores etc. (Johnson, 2017, 3). This style rejected the traditional stage of theatre and created a new radical style of theatre (Johnson, 2017, 3). Many black poets who grew up during the establishment of the Black Arts Movement performed spoken word poetry, which again rejected the hegemonic ideologies of traditional white America, as much of the content of spoken word poetry was seen to include radical political ideas (Johnson, 2017, 3). Soon after, during the early 1980s, came what is known as the sister of spoken word poetry – slam poetry (Johnson, 2017, 4). According to Anderson and Stewart, this style of poetry echoed the traditions of the Black Arts literature (Anderson and Stewart, 2007, 336). Slam poetry is seen to be a competitive style of poetry, whereby poets engage in a "slam" competition in front of an audience and perform their works orally (Johnson, 2017, 2). This genre of poetry put an emphasis on the oral performance of the poem and allowed the audience to feel the raw emotions of the poet (Johnson, 2017, 2). It was also an attempt to draw the audience into their poetry and thus build a community who engaged with the poems (Johnson, 2017, 3). Oware claims that: "the majority of slam poets are from underrepresented groups in America. Their work focuses on its emphasis on their identities as members of racial, sexual and class minorities and the oppression that they have suffered" (Oware, 2010, 153). As a result, many black poets engaged in slam poetry and their works echoed the Black Arts Movement in the sense that the content of their poetry was shocking, emotive and possessed an element of cultural nationalism (Oware, 2010, 153).

The late 1960s also saw the emergence of hip-hop (Washington, 2018, 98). During this time, in conjunction with the struggles of the Civil Rights Movement, many black people found themselves in a state of poverty and despair as employment opportunities were scarce

and violence and acts of crime grew stronger (Washington, 2018, 98). It is said that because of this, many young black men developed hip-hop culture with the aim of communicating their feelings and frustrations in relation to the oppression they suffered (Washington, 2018, 98). Hip-hop is described as a: "cultural form that attempts to negotiate experiences of marginalisation, brutally truncated opportunity, and oppression within the cultural imperatives of African American history, identity and community" (Woldu, 2010, 9-10). The culture consists of a number of artistic elements including emceeing (rap music), b-boying/b-girling (breakdance), DJing and graffiti art (Washington, 2018, 99). Many studies show that hip-hop culture shares both ideological and creative connections with the literature and aims of the Black Arts Movement (Gladney, 1995, 291). It is suggested that black males in particular resonate with hip-hop culture because the art of hip-hop encapsulates the frustrations, struggles and hopes of other black males who have experienced and confronted the disadvantages they face, socially, economically and politically in America (Washington, 2018, 98).

The most controversial element of hip-hop culture is rap music (Woldu, 2010, 10). Rap music was established during the early 1980s and, like slam poetry and spoken word, rap music is said to embody elements of the Black Arts Movement (Ramsey, 2004, 29). Rap is a genre of music that is again predominately associated with black American males (Ramsey, 2004, 29). Tricia Rose describes the act of rapping as: "a vocal performance in which a rapper uses spoken or semi-spoken declamations, usually in rhyming couplets. The rap is revolutionary: rather than a singing or instrumental performance, in this genre the rap is the emotional focal point of the presentation" (Ramsey, 2004, 165). Some common themes of rap music include misogyny, materialism, moral outrage, racism, militantism and political progressivism (Rabaka, 2012, 6). Rap lyrics are often seen as harsh, aggressive and sexist (Rabaka, 2012, 6). Rap artists usually dress in dark clothing, keeping with the 'underground' theme of hip-hop culture (Freeland, 2009, 261). Like the Black Power Movement, rap music is seen as an "underground form of communication for disenfranchised blacks to express anger at society" (Freeland, 2009, 262). Rap music is thus an act of empowerment for black audiences in terms of combatting oppression and embracing their own cultural nationalism (Washington, 2018, 100). Freeland states that: "the themes of the Black Power Movement have sustained themselves over time as inspiration for twenty-first century musical forms such as hip-hop, rap and spoken word that are positive to black cultural pride and political activism (Freeland, 2009, 272). He also views rap music as a mobilising genre that challenges white America and creates "an opening" in the political system in terms of change (Freeland, 2009, 261).

Neal claims that Black Art and music "relate broadly to the African American desire for self-determination and nationhood", which again echoed the aims of the Black Arts Movement and the Black Power Movement (Freeland, 2009, 266-267). Similarly, Rabaka claims that rap music embodies elements of the Black Arts and echoes some of the social movements that preceded the genre (Rabaka, 2012, 1). Ramsey claims that the consciousness of black history still lived within many of these citizens and, therefore, many black people began to become increasingly frustrated with white America (Ramsey, 2004, 29). The "nation within a nation" that the Black Arts Movement created never truly fizzled out, according to Ramsey (2004, 29). Gladney also believes that rap culture is reliant on the works of the Black Arts Movement, claiming that the content of rap music focuses on the same aims as the Black Arts, such as calls of social relevance, black originality and challenging mainstream white America's attitude toward the black community (Gladney, 1995, 291). Rap music has proven to be a force for social change in America today, with many artists rapping about political, social and economic issues that are apparent within the black community (Gladney,

1995, 291). Themes typically centre around racism, sexism, drug-use and spiritual uplift (Gladney, 1995, 291).

Rap music, however, much like the Black Arts Movement, receives a lot of criticism from white society and is perceived as antisocial and violent (Gladney, 1995, 291). However, Gladney claims that in order to appreciate rap music, we must take into account the roots of these black artist in order to understand their aesthetic goals (Gladney, 1995, 291). This is similar to the goals of the Black Arts Movement, where the audience must understand the historical oppression and deep-rooted anger of black Americans (Gladney, 1995, 291). Although rap music receives regular criticism, this is in fact one of the aims of rap music, as again like the Black Arts Movement, it is supposed to serve as a separatist form of black expression (Gladney, 1995, 291). There is in fact an anxiety about authenticity among some black rappers, according to Biddle. When rap music is listened to and enjoyed by white audiences, rapper Ice Cube calls this the process of: "white listeners eavesdropping" (Biddle, 2012, 139); while similarly David Samuels claims that by making rap music all-inclusive, it is "de-authenticising the music itself" (Biddle, 2012, 139)

The evolution and relevance of hip-hop culture and rap music for the black community is still apparent today. There are many black rap artists that strive to embody the main values and aims of the Black Arts Movement and draw on the style of the Black Aesthetic. This can be seen through the work of contemporary rap artist Kendrick Lamar. Lamar is a well-known rap artist, with his music often deemed "complex and powerful" (Wert, 2017, 119). Lamar has recently won the Pulitzer Prize for his rap album *DAMN* – the first black rap album to ever receive this award (Lynskey, 2018). He was born Kendrick Lamar Duckworth on the seventeenth of June 1987 and grew up in Compton, California (The Biography, 2018). The area in which he grew up was filled with gang violence, drug abuse and crime. There was an immense feeling of frustration and anger in the black community in Compton, due to acts of white police brutality towards the black community, particularly the younger male members (The Biography, 2018). To this day in fact, police brutality still remains a problem in Compton and indeed throughout the United States of America (Kennedy, 2015). Despite all of the violence and frustration that surrounded Lamar however, he is said to have remained a straight-A student during his time in education and began to express his feelings of frustration and the need for social justice through writing – first short stories, then poetry, then lyrics (The Biography, 2018). As a young teenager, Lamar discovered his love for hip-hop culture and rap music and became determined to make it in the music industry. At the age of sixteen, Lamar was signed to a record label called Top Dawg Entertainment and shortly after, was signed to well-known black rapper and producer Dr. Dre's label, Aftermath Entertainment (The Biography, 2018). In 2010, Lamar released his first major album and his success grew from there.

Although some may be inclined to dismiss the intended message that can be found in rap music, it becomes clear that Lamar's music is indeed highly political in its message and includes some of the main themes found at the heart of the Black Arts Movement and the Black Aesthetic. His music has always remained a topic of controversy among critics and indeed audiences. His style of music is said to: "weave together free jazz, spoken word, slam poetry, live instrumentation and lyrics that look inward and outward at issues like fame, depression, politics, race and class" (Kennedy, 2015). These themes reflect the themes of Baraka's essay "The Revolutionary Theatre". Furthermore, it becomes clear that Lamar himself feels that as a rap artist, he has a certain responsibility to act as a leader and provide a voice for his community. As we look at some examples of his music, the similarities and links between his themes, language and central message with that of the texts of the Black Arts from the likes of Neal and Baraka will become clear. In a recent interview for *The Touré Show* (Casper, 2018), Lamar discusses some of the challenges and aims that he faces as a

black rap artist. To begin with, Lamar explains that much of his inspiration derived from a book he read as a teenager: *The Autobiography of Malcom X*. This book inspired Lamar and determined how he was going to approach rap music and the political message that his music would have (Casper, 2018). In *The Autobiography of Malcom X*, the struggle that Malcom X faced as a member of a marginalised and oppressed community is discussed. Lamar talks about how he felt as if he related to Malcom X and the struggles he faced, as he himself was a member of the black community (Casper, 2018). This inspired Lamar to: "better [himself] from being in this mind-state of reality" and overcome the racial oppression by embracing the power of blackness – much like Malcom X aimed to do (Casper, 2018). As well as this, like Malcom X he wanted to act as a sort of leader for the black community and provide a voice "for those who don't have a voice" (Casper, 2018). Lamar knew that in order to do so, there had to be a "fire" in his words and a shock-element to his music, in order to inspire members of the black community to trust in the reality of his lyrics (Casper, 2018). This interview shows that Lamar's music consciously engages with the black listener, as did the work of Baraka and Neal.

Rap music for Lamar, allows him to "say what [he] wants, how [he] wants" and express his thoughts and feelings freely (Casper, 2018). When interviewed, Lamar discussed the intended audience for his music, claiming that although his music is listened to and appreciated all over the world, he began writing music for his own community – the black community within America (Casper, 2018). He aims to focus his music on topics solely related to the black community, about issues that they can feel compassion and anger towards, in order to connect with him (Casper, 2018). Lamar admits to feeling confused as to why a white audience would admire his music, as it was simply written for a black audience and involves issues about struggles that are not apparent in the white man's life (Casper, 2018). Although Lamar has won numerous awards at the Grammys throughout the past few years, it is important to note that hip-hop and rap music as a whole, still remains a separate, marginalised category in society. For example, at the 2018 Grammys, Lamar received a total of five awards, including Best Rap Performance, Best Rap Song and Best Rap Album (Greenburg, 2018, 1). What we must note here, however, is that each of these awards are marginalised into a separate category involving only rap music. This suggests that although white society has become comfortable enough to acknowledge rap music and nominate rap music for awards, it will always remain a separate, excluded category from the rest of the traditional, Western, white music (Greenburg, 2018, 1).

Lamar's music links with the themes of the Black Arts texts. Four themes that are widely accessible within his music are: political leadership, separatism, violence and specifically police brutality and finally celebration of blackness. Each theme will be discussed separately, with reference to two songs from his album *To Pimp a Butterfly* (2015). These songs are called "The Blacker The Berry" and "Alright".To begin with, politics is of course a core theme in contemporary rap music (Cheney, 2005, 283). Earlier, this dissertation looked at Baraka and Neal using the Black Aesthetic of texts to address some of the political issues that remained part of the black community. It was very important for Baraka and Neal to act as a founding voice of black identity and speak on behalf of the black community. This was also seen in political leaders such as Malcom X, as discussed. Today, Lamar can be considered a political leader of the black community through his music. In an interview, Lamar states that his music must contain a political message that is powerful and most importantly, relatable to the black youth of today (AFORHTV, 2012). In his song "Alright", Lamar echoes the voice of leaders such as Malcom X, as he reassures the black community that they can stand up to the racism that enslaves them to this day: "We been hurt, been down before / Nigga, we gon' be alright" (Lamar, 2015). The repetition of the word "we" throughout the song ensures that Lamar is speaking on behalf of his community. In his song

"The Blacker The Berry", Lamar says: "All them say we doomed from the start, cah' we black / Remember this, every race starts from the block, jus 'member dat" (Lamar, 2015). Equally, these lyrics show that Lamar's music acts as a medium for which political issues such as racism, inequality and silence of the black community, can be addressed. This was one of the main aims of the Black Arts Movement, as discussed earlier.

Separatism is another common theme in Lamar's music that links with the Black Arts texts. There has historically been a divide between the white and black community in America, as mentioned previously. The texts of the Black Arts were never supposed to unite both communities. Instead, as we learned, the texts highlighted the importance of the Black Aesthetic – a technique that was never to be understood by the white reader. Separatism, as well as highlighting the social and racial divide between both communities, allowed for Black Nationalist ideas to dominate the Black Arts texts, as Neal and Baraka valued black culture as a separate identity from white America (Davidson, 2003, 401). Lamar's music can be seen to favour Black Nationalist ideas and hence, bring awareness to the divide that remains between both communities. In the song "The Blacker The Berry", Lamar says: "Homie you made me black, don't crack my nigga" (Lamar, 2015). These lyrics emphasise the fact that the black community have a separate identity to the white community, as a result of the racial injustice placed on them by the white hegemony of American society. Throughout much of Lamar's music, he discusses the notion of an "us" and "them" in American society. His songs can be seen to draw upon acts of racial injustice toward the black community. Instead of engaging in protest literature however, as the Black Arts aimed to avoid as it adhered to white society as an appeal of sympathy (Neal, 2004, 2014), Lamar shows his anger and frustration toward white society in general, stating: "Excuse my French but fuck you – no fuck y'all / That's as blunt as it gets, I know you hate me, don't you? / You hate my people" (Lamar, 2015).

Violence, specifically police brutality as an act of violence, dominates much of Lamar's music. Words that shocked the reader with its use if violence was an essential part of the Black Arts Movement, as mentioned earlier. As we saw both Neal and Baraka draw on physical entities as a form of violence, such as guns, daggers etc., Lamar too uses physical entities in his lyrics as a way of shocking the audience. "My knees getting' weak and my gun might blow" (Lamar, 2015) is an example of Lamar using violence as a way of expressing his anger towards the injustice that his community has suffered and the need for a lyrical rebellion. On the theme of violence, police brutality is most common. Baraka emphasised the institutionalised racism that black people faced as a result of white authority. Lamar's 2016 Grammy performance was highly considered "controversial and amazing" (Complex News, 2016). Lamar came on stage in chains and handcuffs, supposedly symbolising the institutionalised racism that black people in America are subjected to (Shaw, 2016). His performance paid tribute to Trayvon Martin, a young, black American that had fallen victim to acts of police brutality in 2013 and sparked an entire movement called Black Lives Matter (Shaw, 2016). The album won Best Rap Album on the night and is acclaimed an album that is: "unapologetic in its blackness, speaking directly and exclusively to a black audience (Kennedy, 2015). Interestingly, although hardly surprising, Lamar's performance was widely admired by the black community, yet failed to be understood or accepted by members of the white community, with many taking to social media to deem his performance "racist and offensive (Shaw, 2016). Some of the lyrics in his songs directly address acts of police brutality, for example: "And we hate po-po / Wanna kill ud dead in the street fo' sho" (Lamar, 2015), as well as "They put me inna chains, cah' we black" (Lamar, 2015). Addressing acts of police brutality allows Lamar to expose white hegemony, as did the text "The Revolutionary Theatre".

Finally, the theme of celebration of blackness runs throughout Lamar's music. While Black Arts texts aimed to expose white hegemony and the anger that black people face in

response to the racial oppression placed upon them throughout history, another major feature of Black Arts texts was to celebrate ones identity and black culture. This was addressed earlier in the dissertation. Lamar absolutely uses his music as a source of liberation among the black community. Horowitz states that Lamar uses his music as a way of openly claiming his blackness and thus, distancing himself from the white community (Horowitz, 2015). In his song "The Blacker The Berry", we see a "defiant embrace of blackness" (Wert, 2017, 117). The lyrics: "I'm African American. I'm African / I'm black as the moon / I want you to recognize that I'm a proud monkey" (Lamar, 2015), show that Lamar is encouraging the black community to embrace their black identity, rather than seeking acceptance from white America. This relates to the concept of Black Power, as Lamar is essentially rising above the systemic oppression of black society and embracing the power of blackness and black culture. In his 2016 Grammy performance, Lamar engaged in a tribal dance on stage (Complex News, 2016), which again shows the audience that he is not willing to distance himself from his black roots.

It is clear from my dissertation that without the establishment of the Black Arts Movement and some of the main themes and issues that Neal and Baraka fought to address within black literature, we would not have black rappers such as Lamar writing music of such aggressive nature in America today. It is clear that rap music is deep-rooted in black culture and that even today, many of the themes associated with rap music, coincide with the issues that concerned black society almost sixty years ago. Rap music is overtly shocking in its approach and aims to represent the oppressed community in society, ensuring that the voices of the black community are heard. It is also apparent that rap music, although widely listened to by members of both societies, serves the purpose of catering only to black society. The issues discussed in rap music are often misunderstood by white society, as previously discussed. This is a common factor associated with the texts of the Black Arts, as discussed by Baraka and Neal. Overall, this dissertation argues that contemporary rap music remains a separate genre of music to that of white, Western society. It thus reflects the ongoing tensions that remain between white and black society and hence demonstrates the need for black society to create their own unique culture, where their thoughts and emotions will not go unheard. Finally, this dissertation argues that in Kendrick Lamar's rap music today, we see the key aims, themes and styles of the Black Arts texts of the 1960s. It is argued that Lamar has inherited the ideas of Baraka and Neal, making his music powerful, shocking, violent, aggressive, emotive and most importantly perhaps, exclusively black and therefore, relatable to a black audience.

Bibliography:

Anderson, T. and Stewart, J.B. (2007). *Introduction to African American Studies: Transdisciplinary Approaches and Implications*. Black Classic Press.

Andrews, W. L et al. (1997). *The Oxford Companion to African American Literature*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Andrews, W.L et al. (2002). *The Concise Oxford Companion to African American Literature*. Oxford University Press.

Biddle, I. (2012). *Music and identity politics*. Farnham, England: Ashgate.

Coleman, A.L. (2017). 'A Riot Started in Newark 50 Years Ago. It Shouldn't Have Been a Surprise'. *Time*, 1.

Cox, J (2015). 'The Butterfly Effect'. *Time*. 185, 11, 60.

Daniel Matlin. (2006). 'Lift up Yr Self! Reinterpreting Amiri Baraka (LeRoi Jones), Black Power, and the Uplift Tradition', *The Journal Of American History*. 1, 91.

Davidson, J.S. (2003). 'Sometimes Funny, but Most Times Deadly Serious: Amiri Baraka as Political Satirist'. *African American Review*, 2/3, 339-404.

Freeland, G. K. (2009). 'We're a Winner': Popular Music and the Black Power Movement'. *Social Movement Studies*, 8, 3, pp. 261-288.

Funkhouser, C. (2003). 'LeRoi Jones, Larry Neal, and "The Cricket": Jazz and Poets' Black Fire'. *African American Review*, 37, 2/3, 237-244.

Gail Hilson, W. (2010). 'The Kaleidoscope Of Writing On Hip-Hop Culture'. *Notes*, 1, 9.

Horowitz, S.J. (2015), 'The Blacker The Berry'. *Billboard*, 127, 5, 53.

Johnson, J. (2017). *Killing Poetry: Blackness and the Making of Slam and Spoken Word Communities.* Rutgers University Press.

Keleta-Mae, N. (2016). 'Amiri Baraka: A Lifetime of Saying the Unsayable'. *Canadian Review Of American Studies*, 46, 2, 265-279.

Kirk, J. A. (2016). 'An "Eyeball-to-Eyeball Kind of Organization": Black United Youth and the Black Power Movement in Arkansas'. *Arkansas Historical Quarterly*, 75, 3, 206-238.

Lamar, K. (2015). "The Blacker The Berry". In: *To Pimp a Butterfly.* [CD]. Top Dawg Entertainment.

Lamar, K. (2015). "Alright". In: *To Pimp a Butterfly.* [CD]. Top Dawg Entertainment.

LeRoi Jones (Amiri Baraka). (1965). "The Revolutionary Theatre", *Liberator*.

Marvin J. Gladney. (1995). 'The Black Arts Movement and Hip-Hop'. *African American Review*, 2, 291.

Miah, M. (2018). 'Black Nationalism, Black Solidarity'. *Against The Current*, 32, 192, 2-4.

Neal, L. (2004). 'The Black Arts Movement', in: H. L. Gates and N. Y. McKay, ed., The Norton Anthology of African American Literature. USA: W.W. Norton and Company, pp. 2039-2050.

Oware, M. (2010). 'The Cultural Politics of Slam Poetry: Race, Identity, and the Performance of Popular Verse in America'. *Western Journal of Black Studies*, 34, 4, 473-474.

Peniel, E.J. (2011). 'Still Reinventing Malcom', *Chronicle of Higher Education*, 57, 35, B6-B9.

Rabaka, R. (2012). *Hip Hop's Amnesia : From Blues And The Black Women's Club Movement To Rap And The Hip Hop Movement*, Lanham, Maryland: Lexington Books.

Ramsey, G. (2004). *Race Music: Black Cultures from Bebop to Hip-Hop.* Los Angeles: University of California Press.

Smethurst, J. (2003). 'Pat Your Foot and Turn the Corner: Amiri Baraka, the Black Arts Movement, and the Poetics of Popular Avant-Garde'. *African American Review*, 37, 2/3, 261-270.

Washington, A. R. (2018). 'Integrating Hip-Hop Culture and Rap Music Into Social Justice Counseling With Black Males'. *Journal of Counseling & Development*, 96, 1, 97-105,

Wert, A. (2017). 'Tension and Ambiguity: Paul Tillich and Kendrick Lamar on Courage and Faith'. *Toronto Journal of Theology*. 33, 1, 113-121.

William, T. (2010). *The Civil Rights Movement: Struggle and Resistance.* Hampshire: United Kindgom. Palgrave Macmillan.

Webography:

AFORHTV. (2012). *Kendrick Lamar: Politics As Usual*. [online] available: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FRSinfuV60o [accessed 18 May 2018].

Boyd, H. (2014). 'Black History Month: Amiri Baraka Leaves a Radical Legacy in Theater'. Daily News New York. [online] available: http://www.nydailynews.com/new-york/baraka-radical-stage-legacy-article-1.1605507 [accessed 08 April 2018].

Casper. (2018). *Kendrick Lamar Talks Murder, Malcom X and Meeting Obama: Touré Show.* [online] available: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ex6TEvGXje0 [accessed 09 April 2018].

Complex News. (2016). *Kendrick Wins Big at Grammys and Delivers a Powerful Performance.* [online] available: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JtFEBAF1Ep0 [accessed 17 May 2018].

Greenburg, Z. O'M. (2018). 'Why the Grammy's Were an Epic Bust Despite Kendrick Lamar's Wins'. *Forbes*. [online] available: https://www.forbes.com/sites/zackomalleygreenburg/2018/01/29/why-the-grammys-were-an-epic-hip-hop-bust-despite-kendrick-lamars-wins/#1421f6f6106f [accessed 09 April 2018].

Gray. S. (2018). 'Kendrick Lamar Becomes the First Rapper to Win The Pulitzer Music Prize'. *Fortune*. [online] available: http://fortune.com/2018/04/16/kendrick-lamar-pulitzer-first-rapper-damn/ [accessed 20 May 2018].

Kennedy, G. D. (2015). 'Grammy Awards 2016: Kendrick Lamar Made History with Unapologetically Black Album'. *Los Angeles Times*. [online] available: http://www.latimes.com/entertainment/music/posts/la-et-ms-grammys-2016-kendrick-lamar-grammy-history-20151206-story.html [accessed 10 April 2018].

Lynskey, D. (2018). 'From Street Kid to Pulitzer: Why Kendrick Lamar Deserves the Prize' The Guardian. [online] available: https://www.theguardian.com/music/2018/apr/22/kendrick-lamar-wins-pulitzer-prize-damn-album [accessed 17 May 2018].

Nash, W. R. (2017). 'Black Arts Movement'. *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Literature*. [online] available: http://literature.oxfordre.com/view/10.1093/acrefore/9780190201098.001.0001/acrefore-9780190201098-e-630 [accessed 09 April 2018].

Shaw, A. R. (2016). 'Kendrick Lamar Blasted by Some Whites for His Grammy Performance'. *Rolling Out.* [online] available: https://rollingout.com/2016/02/16/kendrick-lamar-blasted-by-some-whites-who-were-offended-by-his-grammy-performance/ [accessed 16 May 2018].

The Biography. (2018). 'Kendrick Lamar Biography'. [online] available: https://www.biography.com/people/kendrick-lamar-21349281 [accessed 10 April 2018].