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Essay #1: 1777 Words

Love in Society, Nowhere in Sight: Musical Analysis of a Decade-Old Song

“What’s wrong with the world, mama?” No, seriously; what really is wrong with the world today? These lyrics from a song produced more than a decade ago still resonate to this day, with the world spreading more problems than ever before. Released in June 2003 as the lead single of the album *Elephunk*, “Where Is The Love?” is a song by the hip-hop group The Black Eyed Peas that quickly rose up the charts and the radio, peaking at #8 on the *US Billboard Hot 100* and receiving multiple nominations for awards that year. It became widely known for its catchy hooks and lyrics in which the artists reference various problems and crises happening worldwide. The song strives to capture the attention of those who have damaged society through violence or harassment by reminding them of the accumulating problems and misery that they have been constantly causing for others. The Black Eyed Peas intends to spread positive vibes of “love” and wants this target audience to show a greater appreciation to the world in order to help mend the broken remnants of society that emerged as a result of this turmoil. Though the vague message of spreading “love” and its content may seem generic for every society, its impact becomes more relevant with today’s current events, especially in the political and social sphere

of the US where prevailing issues of hate, racism, feminism, or immigration are still affecting people's lifestyles. The Black Eyed Peas use compelling imagery and various cultural references throughout the lyrics, as well as utilizing rhetorical persuasion through emotion by singing and rapping in a tone that sounds like they are criticizing the target audience of those who have damaged society directly through constant use of second-person POV. Although the group may not necessarily be the divine figure that will end all hatred present in the world, the group still plays a very important role in fixing the world whether small or large-scaled. This is significant, especially for the readers and the target audience, because they will realize that they are fully capable of improving the many aspects of life for future generations and making the world, overall, a better place.

One key technique that is very evident and effective within the song is The Black Eyed Peas' use of imagery to adequately outline and emphasize the underlying problems posed in society. The group primarily does this in order to convince their audience that these problems are not minuscule towards their impact in society, but are instead very serious in terms of the damage it can cause for everyone. A primary example of this use of technique within the song is with the lines "Nations droppin' bombs. Chemical gases fillin' lungs of little ones." (33-34) The group is making the point that war around the world is causing chaos not just to the nations involved in the conflict, but also to the innocent civilians that are being affected from this conflict. Instead of merely stating that the innocent are also suffering from the war, the group emphasizes the effect by saying that even children are inhaling toxic fumes that can possibly kill them. They are exaggerating the fact that love within the world has disappeared so much to the point that even young ones are exposed to chemicals primarily used against combatants within

the battlefield, chemicals that directly harm and/or kill their victims. This creates a compelling point to the audience that their actions, whether directly or indirectly, are generating more havoc to society, and this is highlighted when the group illustrates, in words, what is happening to the children. By connecting the dots, they are essentially saying that the loss of love is resulting in children getting hurt and becoming impaired due to the actions of multiple offenders. Thus, by using effective imagery, The Black Eyed Peas is able to emphasize the importance of love by providing images that depict a tarnishing society if love became a powerless factor in society. As a result, the Black Eyed Peas will be able to further lessen the amount of suffering that younger generations may have to live through.

Adding on to the list of narrative techniques utilized, The Black Eyed Peas also includes various cultural references that date back to as far as a century ago. The group uses these references in order to validate the fact that these occurrences came about because of the fact that there was simply not enough love spread around the world. (Lipsitz) An example of one such reference is on the lines “Overseas, yeah, we try to stop terrorism. But we still got terrorists here livin’ . . . The Bloods and The Crips and KKK.” (5-8) The group is making a point that even though society as a whole is trying hard to make sure that terrorists are taken care of in other parts of the world, society is also blinded by the fact that there are also terrorists, literally and figuratively, still residing within their own community. Because this song was released in 2003, the group was referencing “Overseas . . . stop terrorism” to the Iraq War that began as result of the United States’ invasion of Iraq in 2003 as part of the war on terror following the 9/11 attacks. However, they are also referencing other terrorists groups like the “KKK” that are part of the global community who are disrupting society. The group makes this comparison because the

KKK was a hate group that committed sins equal to, if not, worse than, the terrorists that have wreaked havoc on other parts of the world. Although it is arguable that groups like ISIS and Al-Qaeda and the damage they have inflicted towards other countries is insurmountable compared to the damage inflicted by domestic hate groups like the KKK, it is still important to note that they have caused just as much disarray to society as other groups have on a social level. According to a journal entry published by the State Historical Society of Iowa and written by historian scholar Robert Neymeyer in 1992, “Not only was the Klan anti-Catholic and anti-Jewish, but it continued to use violence and vigilantism to intimidate the African-American population” (Neymeyer). The KKK, particularly the second iteration of the KKK in 1915, emerged because of the fact that many whites resented Catholicism and opposed people such as Jews, blacks, and immigrants. The Black Eyed Peas are making a point that hate groups such as the KKK existed because discrimination, racism, and xenophobia existed in society. Because there was not enough love spreading to other individuals, it was causing a divide between those that were discriminating and those who were discriminated against. This is significant because even today, there is still discrimination and racism evident as a result of not having enough love spread towards one another. If people were more accepting of each other’s differences and individuality towards one another, these hate groups would most probably have never emerged in our history. Even today, everyone, especially the target audience of those who have constantly corrupted society, could have played a role in lessening the number of hate crimes and injustices caused by many groups if there was just enough widespread love across the world.

In addition to the preceding narrative techniques used by The Black Eyed Peas to convey their message of spreading greater appreciation of love towards the world, the group also utilizes

rhetorical persuasion by appealing to the audience's emotions. As my friend once told me, "Why does [will.i.am] (founding member of The Black Eyed Peas) sound so angry? I can actually feel him blaming me even though it's just a song" (Chan). Specifically, the tone and direction at which they present the song always seem to refer to "you", the listener, with criticism by constantly asking rhetorical questions to make the listeners fully comprehend the problems of society and, ultimately, let them influence their own emotions. An example of this technique evident within the song can be found on the lines "Where's the love, y'all, come on . . . Where's the truth, y'all . . ." (44-46) Although these lines may not have much meaning content-wise, it's the tone and the way the artists say these lines that are effective in getting their message across. They are addressing the audience directly by rhetorically asking them what has happened to the world and why love has dissipated to the point that more problems are emerging in society. They are also addressing the audience directly to give the message that the audience is partly responsible for the damage caused to society, that they are partly the ones generating more chaos and more discord for everyone else. By speaking to them in a tone that sounds similar to criticism, it metaphorically compares The Black Eyed Peas as the parents that are scolding their children, the audience, because of their faulty missteps and making the world a less-friendly place. This way, the audience is more inclined to listen to the judgement of the group because they can learn from their mistakes and make sure that the group's message really sticks into everyone's minds. Had this song been verbalized in a different manner, the effectiveness would not have been as substantial since it would lean more towards an informative song instead of an encouraging or criticizing song. However, because The Black Eyed Peas was able to express their inner emotions without holding back, the group was successful in getting their message

across; to appeal to the audience's emotion through persuasion in order to ensure that love can spread even further for everyone else in society.

It's important to note that The Black Eyed Peas used these techniques in order to help spread more of the love within one another to promote a better world. Targeted towards everyone who has damaged society in some form or another, the group wanted to make their audience feel that their actions to the world, directly or indirectly, causes even the slightest amount of chaos and disturbance for everybody else in society. Because we are not living in a utopian society, it is improbable to think that the negativity everyone is experiencing will just dissipate completely from the world. However, by constantly spreading positivity and love, the world can, without a doubt, slowly start to become a better place for everyone to live in. In the words of will.i.am and Taboo, "We only got one world" (88), so really cherish the aura of love emanating off all of society and protect the world from all the things that are making the world go wrong today.

Works Cited

Chan, Eme. Personal Conversation. February 1, 2017.

This is a personal conversation with a friend regarding the content and meaning of the song by the Black Eyed Peas. According to her, there is a lot of emphasis placed on the presence of only one world and having to take care of that world through the means of spreading love. Recognition of the tone of the artists' is also vivid, as she describes the artist's' intention was to blame society but also empathize with those who were suffering along with the rest of the world. Furthermore, she notices many historical references that predate to many decades ago, such as various movements and political agendas that the world was currently facing against.

Lipsitz, George. *Reveling in the Rubble: Where is the Love?. Musicological identities: Essays in honor of Susan McClary*. Edited by Steven Baur, Raymond Knapp, and Jacqueline Warwick, Aldershot: Ashgate, 2008, pp. 31-46.

This chapter excerpted briefly discusses the correlation between the Black Eyed Peas' 2003 hit single *Where is the Love?* and the 1972 narrative of the same name by Donna Hathaway and Roberta Flack, and how the current version is a build up of different point of views from the original version. The excerpts pinpoint to ridicule society and ask society as a whole as to where the love has gone that led to a time completely filled with hate and suffering. Lipsitz also references the song to the Civil Rights Movement, and states how the song's content coincides with the unjustified hate and fear that happened during that decade.

Neymeyer, Robert. "The Ku Klux Klan of the 1920S in the Midwest and West: a Review Essay."

The Annals of Iowa, vol. 51, no. 6, 1992, pp. 625–633.,

ir.uiowa.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=9693&context=annals-of-iowa. Accessed 2 Mar. 2017.

This article reviews, essentially, the second iteration of the Ku Klux Klan that emerged during the 1920s in the Midwest and West and how their presence caused widespread terror for everybody in the US, most notably the African-Americans. It begins by describing the speculations and origins of a second new Klan, and their connections with multiple social and political agendas during this time period. Despite their oppressive image throughout the nation, the Klan held a reputable position during the 1920s because of their traditional values of rejecting urban values. As time progressed, however, America was starting to become more liberal, and the Klan turned more towards violence and hate crimes to stop other races and ethnicities from rising in society.

"Where Is The Love?"

- 1 What's wrong with the world, mama
- 2 People livin' like they ain't got no mamas
- 3 I think the whole world addicted to the drama
- 4 Only attracted to things that'll bring you trauma
- 5 Overseas, yeah, we try to stop terrorism
- 6 But we still got terrorists here livin'
- 7 In the USA, the big CIA
- 8 The Bloods and The Crips and the KKK
- 9 But if you only have love for your own race
- 10 Then you only leave space to discriminate
- 11 And to discriminate only generates hate
- 12 And when you hate then you're bound to get irate
- 13 Madness is what you demonstrate
- 14 And that's exactly how anger works and operates
- 15 Man, you gotta have love just to set it straight
- 16 Take control of your mind and meditate
- 17 Let your soul gravitate to the love, y'all, y'all
- 18 People killin', people dyin'
- 19 Children hurt and you hear them cryin'
- 20 Can you practice what you preach?
- 21 Or would you turn the other cheek?
- 22 Father, Father, Father help us
- 23 Send some guidance from above
- 24 'Cause people got me, got me questionin'
- 25 Where is the love (Love)
- 26 Where is the love (The love)
- 27 Where is the love (The love)
- 28 Where is the love, the love, the love
- 29 It just ain't the same, old ways have changed
- 30 New days are strange, is the world insane?
- 31 If love and peace are so strong
- 32 Why are there pieces of love that don't belong?
- 33 Nations droppin' bombs
- 34 Chemical gasses fillin' lungs of little ones
- 35 With ongoin' sufferin' as the youth die young
- 36 So ask yourself is the lovin' really gone
- 37 So I could ask myself really what is goin' wrong
- 38 In this world that we livin' in people keep on givin' in
- 39 Makin' wrong decisions, only visions of them dividends
- 40 Not respectin' each other, deny thy brother
- 41 A war is goin' on but the reason's undercover
- 42 The truth is kept secret, it's swept under the rug
- 43 If you never know truth then you never know love
- 44 Where's the love, y'all, come on (I don't know)
- 45 Where's the truth, y'all, come on (I don't know)
- 46 Where's the love, y'all
- 47 People killin', people dyin'
- 48 Children hurt and you hear them cryin'
- 49 Can you practice what you preach?
- 50 Or would you turn the other cheek?
- 51 Father, Father, Father help us
- 52 Send some guidance from above
- 53 'Cause people got me, got me questionin'
- 54 Where is the love (Love)
- 55 Where is the love (The love)? (x6)
- 61 Where is the love, the love, the love?
- 62 I feel the weight of the world on my shoulder
- 63 As I'm gettin' older, y'all, people gets colder
- 64 Most of us only care about money makin'
- 65 Selfishness got us followin' the wrong direction
- 66 Wrong information always shown by the media
- 67 Negative images is the main criteria
- 68 Infecting the young minds faster than bacteria
- 69 Kids wanna act like what they see in the cinema
- 70 Yo', whatever happened to the values of humanity
- 71 Whatever happened to the fairness and equality
- 72 Instead of spreading love we're spreading animosity
- 73 Lack of understanding, leading us away from unity
- 74 That's the reason why sometimes I'm feelin' under
- 75 That's the reason why sometimes I'm feelin' down
- 76 There's no wonder why sometimes I'm feelin' under
- 77 Gotta keep my faith alive 'till love is found
- 78 Now ask yourself
- 79 Where is the love? (x4)

83 Father, Father, Father, help us
84 Send some guidance from above
85 'Cause people got me, got me questionin'
86 Where is the love?

87 Sing with me y'all:
88 One world, one world (We only got)
89 One world, one world (That's all we got)
90 One world, one world
91 And something's wrong with it (Yeah)
92 Something's wrong with it (Yeah)
93 Something's wrong with the wo-wo-world, yeah
94 We only got
95 (One world, one world)
96 That's all we got
97 (One world, one world)