"We shall overcome" and Gangsta Rap: an investigation of the role of music in the civil rights movement and in contemporary urban society

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"We Shall Overcome" and Gangsta Rap: An Investigation of the role of Music in the Civil Rights Movement and in Contemporary Urban Society

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April, 1996
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April 15, 1996
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Table of Contents

I. Introduction .................................................. pp. 3-7

II. The Music of the Civil Rights Movement........ pp. 8-15

III. Gangsta Rap and Contemporary Urban Society ......................... pp. 16-43

IV. Conclusions .................................................. p. 44

V. Implications of this study on Leadership ..... pp. 45-51

VI. Appendix A (Gangsta rap lyrics) ....................... p. 52

VII. Bibliography ................................................ pp. 53-54
Introduction

"Music, of all the arts, seems to be the most remote from the ordinary concerns and preoccupations of people; of all things created by man, its utility, as that word is generally understood, is least easy to demonstrate" (Sessions, 3). Within the twentieth century, scholars and politicians have posed questions regarding the utility of the arts, inquiries that artists and the public alike had never had to answer before. The arts have always been viewed as aesthetically pleasing, or a pleasurable past-time for most. But, the question, "Why are the arts important?" is a difficult one to answer. With budget cuts in many scholastic arts programs and with the severe seventy percent decrease in the budget of the National Endowment of the Arts, it is pertinent that this question be answered.

The importance of studying the role of music in the Civil Rights Movement and in contemporary urban society is two-fold. First, music plays a vital leadership role in both of these contexts. In studying this role, leaders can gain a comprehensive understanding of historic African American social movements, specifically, the Civil Rights Movement, as well as gain insight into the problems today's urban society faces. Second, this study will attempt to demonstrate the "utility" of music by highlighting two critical social movements of our time in which music has played, and continues to play, an important role.

We, as leadership scholars, must try to fully investigate all aspects of social movements that have occurred in the past in
order to better equip ourselves, and our leaders, for the future. Unfortunately, much of the research completed by scholars has focused more on the politics and economics of a social movement, rather than giving full attention to society itself. Particularly, not enough attention has been given to the culture of the portion of society involved in a social movement. Scholars miss a vital component of a social movement when they do not take into consideration the different aspects of culture that affect a particular movement. There are many instances of music functioning as a driving force in social movements. The Civil Rights Movement, the Peace Movement, and the Gay and Lesbian Rights Movement, to name a few, are all instances in which music played an important role in not only the momentum of the movement, but also in the expression of the citizens' concerns and their dissent with society. In examining any one of these movements, scholars can gain a greater understanding of the concerns, fears, and hopes of that portion of society.

James MacGregor Burns and countless other scholars have argued that there has been a paradigm shift in leadership studies, from the industrial paradigm of leadership, to a post-industrial paradigm. This new paradigm includes a multi-disciplinary approach to leadership, and although the phenomenon of relating the arts to leadership is a relatively new one, this phenomenon will surely continue to grow. We, as scholars of leadership within this new paradigm, must give the aspect of music and culture our full attention when studying social
movements in order to discover the implications that these aspects of society have for leadership.

Leadership is often described by a diagram of three circles which interconnect; one circle for the leader, one for the followers, and one for the context, and the area where the circles overlap is leadership. After studying the music of a society involved in a social movement, one will see how music has an impact on all three circles. Thus, music can be seen as a connecting factor, a link, between leader, follower, and context.

Increasing our knowledge of the leadership present within social movements is crucial, for if leaders of today have a comprehensive understanding of the leadership within past social movements, history is not likely to repeat itself. During the Civil Rights Movement, the voices of African Americans became so loud, so strong, that our country had no choice but to listen. However, there are still racial injustices that are omni-present in our society, and the voices of "gangsta rappers" are heard, but often misunderstood. Our leaders must study and gain an understanding of this music in order to gain insight into the problems of contemporary urban society, so that racial injustices of the past and present can be put to rest.

In studying leadership contexts like the Civil Rights Movement and the plight of contemporary urban society, one can also hope to demonstrate the "utility" of music. One can draw attention to the utility of singing as a means to group cohesion, of music as a means of soothing the savage beast, and of visual
art as a means of expression which would not have as great an
effect if words were used in its place. After studying the role
of music within leadership contexts such as the aforementioned,
its "utility" becomes clearer. But, in order to learn about the
utility of music, one must first study examples in which music
has been utilized; in this case, the Civil Rights Movement, and
the voice of contemporary urban society, gangsta rap music.

For this study, the obvious choice for a research design
method was a historical design. This type of research method is
defined by Natalie L. Sproull as "a research design for which the
data or physical artifacts already exist and thus cannot be
changed or manipulated" (152). The primary sources that I have
gathered are testimonials found in biographies or from
interviews of leaders and participants of each movement. My
secondary sources include texts from historians and researchers
who have conducted studies that are pertinent to this subject
material.

I have decided to describe, in detail, each movement
separately, according to their respective places in history. For
each movement, I have tried to outline the different uses of
music in each, and how these uses affected the movement itself,
and its participants. Due to the controversial nature of gangsta
rap, I have included extensive arguments for and against the
music, as well as its application in relation to leadership. I
will try to explain similarities and differences between both
movements in the conclusions of this study as well as
implications for both on leadership.
The Music of the Civil Rights Movement

The Civil Rights Movement has been described by some as the greatest singing movement this country has experienced (Carawan 3). Music played an extremely important role in both expression of dissent and victory, and also in group cohesion during the movement. Most of the literature regarding the role of music within the movement are testimonials from participants and leaders of the movement that experienced the affects of the music first-hand.

Bernice Johnson Reagon, both a participant in and scholar of the Civil Rights Movement, conducted an extensive study of the role of music in the Civil Rights Movement in her Howard University Dissertation, "Songs of the Civil Rights Movement, 1955-65: A Study in Cultural History." Reagon discusses the importance of folklore1 in any type of African American movement. She asserts that,

Any study of mass movements involving Blacks should take into careful consideration their folklore. This body of material recorded a motivative and attitudinal aspect of Black participation in the world in which they lived. (37-38)

Therefore, studying the music of the Civil Rights Movement, would give one a different kind of perspective than perhaps a historical text might give. Reagon is suggesting that the music of the movement can help to uncover the motivations and attitudes of movement participants during that time period, thus giving a

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1Throughout her dissertation, Reagon refers to music, particularly the body of gospel music, as folklore.
more comprehensive historical perspective. She goes on to state that,

Songs did not necessarily bring about a revolution in one's opinions, but the Black musical Movement experience did serve to raise questions and crystalize issues, in a form that many understood. (22)

Thus, the music helped citizens realize injustices in our society. Although the music might not have raised questions, it certainly led people to a different mentality, one of confidence that African Americans could "overcome" their hardships. Many understood the music and could relate to it because much of the Freedom Songs were adaptations of old gospel songs that most African Americans were familiar with.

The use of song to express dissent against society or hopes of freedom was not a new technique to African Americans during the 1950s. This collective expression was used during the very beginning of the Civil Rights Movement when African Americans were still slaves on plantations. Mahalia Jackson, a famous Freedom Singer and gospel singer during the 1950s, explains the role of music in the older days of the Civil Rights Movement. She states,

Using songs as a way of expressing protest and gaining strength and hope runs way back deep in the American Negro's past. When the colored slaves on the plantations sang, "Steal away to Jesus, I ain't got long to say here," they weren't talking just about Heaven; they were expressing their secret hope that they, too, would have their chance to escape up North to freedom (Sernett 453).

The African American slaves needed some form of outlet to release their anger towards the white man, and express their hopes of freedom without the fear of reprisal from their 'owners'. Music
provided this outlet. Music as a form of expression did not just appear in the African American community struggle for equality in the 1950s, it was used long before that time, and then reappeared when collective dissent needed to be expressed.

Reverend C.T. Vivian explained that, at first, when trying to rally support for the movement in its early years within his church, the hymns sung by the choir did not reinforce the message of the sermons that he was delivering to his congregation. At this point in time within the movement, music had not begun to play the important role that it later occupied. Vivian recalls,

> We didn't realize how important a dynamic music would be to a movement...[We learned] that singing could be a unifying force in struggle, and that commonly known songs, particularly southern gospel and religious songs with repetitive stanzas adapted to the situation, were most effective (Carawan 4).

Not all music was effective in the movement. As Vivian points out, certain songs needed to be adapted to the situation. However, once those songs were adapted, they had a powerful impact and acted as a "strong unifying force in the struggle." Reagon echoes Vivian's comments that traditional lyrics were transformed and melodies adapted to create freedom songs capable of expressing the force and intent of the movement (Carawan 5).

A common alteration of traditional texts was to change a singular pronoun, such as 'I', to a plural pronoun, 'we'. Thus, rather than singing "I Shall Overcome", as the old gospel song was originally worded, the 'theme' of the Civil Rights Movement became "We Shall Overcome." The songs did not only speak for the individual, but spoke for African Americans as a collective
whole. According to Dr. Jon Michael Spenser, scholar of music and black church studies, "the collective language of the freedom songs fostered the needed sense of community" (85).

Martin Luther King Jr. also emphasized how important music was to the movement in his book, Why We Can't Wait. He recollects,

An important part of the mass meetings was the freedom songs. In a sense, the freedom songs are the soul of the movement...I have heard people talk of their beat and rhythm, but we in the movement are as inspired by their words...These songs bind us together, give us courage together, help us to march together (57-58).

Notice how King repeats the collective word 'together', emphasizing the fact that the freedom songs did not just bind them together when they were involved in a freedom march, but bound them together in whatever they did and felt.

The music of the Civil Rights Movement did more than just bind African Americans together in their struggle for freedom; it also was used as a means of gathering support, disseminating information, as well as to challenge the authority of the system. For example, Bernice Reagon explains that

With the need to gather supporters and disseminate information on the Civil Rights Movement, the music gained increased importance as a means of conveying the nature and intensity of the struggle to audiences outside the geography of Movement activity (146).

The music of the movement was used as a vehicle of communication, conveying dissatisfaction with the equality of the nation. Reagon also stressed how important oral communication was to the movement:

Movement participants responded more readily to oral than to
written communication. This reflected the fact that most of the activities of the Civil Rights Movement were carried on in the south where the oral cultural life of the community was strong, essential, and, of the people. (14)

Thus, if leaders of the movement were to try to rally support by conveying information via written medium, the movement might not have had as strong a following because of the strong oral traditions of the southern blacks. As one can see, music was a very effective means of gathering support in this demographic area. Similarly, when trying to rally support in another demographic sector of the nation, leaders of the movement might have had to use a different medium to express their ideas. Regardless, music was the most effective means of conveying information in the south, and if leaders had failed to recognize this fact early on, it would have been detrimental to the momentum of the movement.

Not only did music express dissatisfaction with our nation's racial equality, it also conveyed the intensity of emotion charging the movement. Jon Michael Spenser points out that "Singing was not only a source of courage, it was a means of responding to events and audaciously 'talking back' to the establishment" (91). If one person were to speak out, he or she would easily be arrested or harmed. However, if collectively the members of the movement "talked back" through their music, it was much harder for all of them to be punished. In essence, the movement gained its resistance to physical oppression through the unity of their voices.

Thus, it is clear, that music played an extremely important
role in the Civil Rights Movement through the mid-1960s. Music was a useful tool in giving the members courage to face their fears, in helping to spread the message of the movement, and in allowing an outlet for African Americans to express their feelings. (This outlet is not unlike the outlet that gangsta rap artists use to express their feelings and to spread information of the atrocities occurring in their urban communities, a point I will return to later.) However, the passivity of the Freedom Songs became angering to some members of the movement because of the deaths of many of the members of the group.

James Meredith was shot in the back during his solo march against fear in 1965. The next day, King and other members of the group came to continue Meredith's march against fear. Along the way, King started singing "We Shall Overcome" with the group, but when the time came to sing the line "black and white together", some of the participants stopped singing. King recalls this incident in his book, Where Do We Go From Here, where he states that these members of the group later told him that they would no longer sing those words. "In fact," they continued, "the whole song should be discarded. Not 'We Shall Overcome,' but 'We Shall Overrun'" (26-27).

Dr. Jon Michael Spenser concludes that "We shall overrun," overthrow, and conquer, was reflective of a growing corpus of left-wing lyrics being written by young SNCC members (97). Dissention from within the group was now apparent. Len Chandler's "Move on Over or We'll Move on Over You," is a perfect
reflection of the discord between members of the movement:

You conspire to keep us silent in the field and in
the slum
You promise us the vote and sing us, "We Shall
Overcome"
But John Brown knew what freedom was and died to
win us some
why we keep marching on.

CHORUS

Move on over or we'll move on over you (3X)
And the movement's moving on (Spenser 97)

Dr. Spenser describes the dissonance that these songs
created in the movement's philosophy, and how that dissonance
became more and more audible. He explains that,

As long as SCLC, SNCC, CORE, NAACP, and the National Urban
League sang together there existed a common chord. When
they could no longer sing together, because the radical
youth were neither in step with the drum major nor in tune
with his theology, then the dissonance of their silence
became more audible to those who listened on (97).

At this point in time there arose a crisis within the movement.
King's leadership was not viewed as effective for some of the
members of the group. The philosophies that accompanied the
movement thus far were becoming frustrating and banal to those
members that wanted to see change immediately. The role of the
song to the militants was not important; rather, their silence
was their song.

Their philosophical differences developed into a full-blown
conflict; non-violent versus militant, song versus silence.
Members of the movement were seeking a change in leadership.
Those that adopted the militant attitude were tired of seeing
their fellow brothers and sisters beaten and killed right before their eyes. They could no longer swallow their pride and sing about the freedom that would be theirs, "someday." The banner of non-violence was the Freedom Songs, while the banner of violence was militancy and supremacy (Spencer, 100). Thus, the Black Power movement became another driving force behind the Civil Rights Movement, with a whole new ideology and means of expression.

Regardless of this change in leadership and ideology, music continued to play a vital role in the momentum of the movement, as well as in collective expression of dissent, dissemination of information, and in the cohesion of the non-violent protestors. Dr. Spenser sums it up best when he writes, "From 'We Shall Overcome' to 'We Shall Overrun,' SCLC to the Black Muslims, non-violence to violence, singing to silence--the history of the movement is documented in the music" (105).
Gangsta Rap and Contemporary Urban Society

Although the music and culture of rap and hip-hop artists did not make its true impact on our society until the 1980s, rap music and hip-hop culture have been present in America since the 1970s. In order to gain a better understanding of the gangsta rap music of today, one must first look to the root of this music, which is the hip-hop culture and rap music of the late 1970s. According to Michael Eric Dyson, author of Between God and Gangsta Rap: Bearing Witness to Black Culture,

The severe '70s busted the economic boom of the '60s...[Closer to home] there was the depletion of social services to reverse the material ruin of black life. Later, public spaces for black recreation were gutted by Reaganomics or violently transformed by lethal drug economics. Hip-hop was born in these bleak conditions (177).

Rap music started out as music in the streets, or in small theaters in the ghettos and other poor urban areas. Rappers were not known as artists back in the '70s; they were doing something different, they were being creative in their neighborhoods, rather than being destructive. Rap music combined funky rhythms and fast lyrics to create a new form of music, influenced by reggae, funk, rock, and R & B music. After the word spread about rap music, many local clubs outside of the ghettos invited these rappers to come and perform. Soon after that, rap artists such as Grandmaster Flash and Run D.M.C. were signed to record labels.

The rap lyrics of artists in the late '70s and early '80s were quite different than the lyrics of gangsta rap today. However, the lyrics were used as a testimonial to the conditions
of the ghettos and urban areas in which rap and hip-hop were born, similar to the lyrics found in gangsta rap. For example, artist Grandmaster Flash speaks of the poor ghetto conditions in his 1979 song, "The Message": "Rats in the front room/ roaches in the back/ junkies in the alley with a baseball bat" (Simmons, 8/13/95). Song lyrics such as these started the trend of using rap music to describe the poor social conditions of the ghettos.

The rap music of the 1980s was less involved with social commentary on the conditions of the urban ghetto and put more of an emphasis on the dance and musical aspects of rap. Groups like Run-D.M.C., the Beastie Boys, and DJ Jazzy Jeff and the Fresh Prince were adding humorous lyrics to fast drum beats, as well as "scratching" records to add a new appeal to rap music. In the first half of the decade, rap music became popular in mainstream American music. Although most artists were African-Americans, many of the audiences at performances were fifty percent white and fifty percent black, because of rap's new dance appeal and humorous lyrics (Simmons, 8/13/95).

In the second half of the 1980s, more and more rappers were using the music to make a statement about the political and racial injustices of our society, as well as commenting on the poor social conditions of the African-American urban population. According to Dyson,

Rap in its early years in the '80s was more politically conscious than the gangsta rap of the '90s. Public Enemy, which truly put rap on the charts, were trying to accomplish their stated goal in 1988 to "Teach the bourgeoisie, and rock the boulevard." Their lyrics challenged radio stations to play their material and expressed their rage against a
Public Enemy was clear about what they were trying to do with their music. The group had something to say, and they wanted people to listen. Not only did they want to entertain by "rocking the boulevard", they also wanted the politicians and policy makers to realize that a large portion of our society was unhappy with the conditions of America.

Unfortunately, Public Enemy became popular during the same year that gangsta rap was born. In 1988, Ice Cube and his group NWA turned the rap scene upside-down with their album Straight Outta Compton, "lyrically unearthing the horrors and subversive pleasures of the South Central ghettos" (Dyson, 172). With NWA, and other groups soon to follow, came the gangsta rap of today, with its use of misogynistic and violent language, and references to drug abuse and rape. Dyson argues that Public Enemy's music was ignored by the political realm because the shock value of gangsta rap lyrics obscured any political message that Public Enemy was trying to send. He explains that

When political rap group Public Enemy was at its artistic and popular height, most of the critics of gangsta rap didn't insist on the group's prominence in black cultural politics. Instead, Public Enemy and other conscientious rappers were often viewed as controversial figures whose inflammatory racial rhetoric was cause for caution or alarm (180).

Because of gangsta rap's new violent and shocking lyrics, all rap artists were placed into one category, dangerous and offensive, even if the artists did not use this inflammatory language. Public Enemy, in fact, did not use the extremes that
gangsta rap artists were using. Instead of seeking help from politically conscious musicians that were trying to change the system, critics of gangsta rap who were seeking answers to black cultural problems chose to ignore the artists that might have given insight into these problems. Thus, gangsta rap became an overshadowing force against the work of politically conscious rap artists.

Public Enemy, as well as other politically conscious rap groups that were not from the ghetto, such as the Zulu Nation rap coalition, continued to challenge the system with their lyrics. Public Enemy sought to fight the power in songs such as "By the Time I Get to Arizona", attacking the refusal of Arizona's then-Governor Meacham to recognize Martin Luther King Jr.'s birthday as a state holiday. However, as Michael Eric Dyson points out, "by 1991, the rules of hip-hop were changing, with biting black nationalist commentary and Afrocentric world views giving way to sexual hedonism and the glamorization of violence" (167). Soon after that time, gangsta rap captured the spotlight, gaining incredible media, political, and citizen attention for its shocking lyrics and negative subject material.

Numerous politicians and concerned citizens have attacked gangsta rap lyrics because of its abusive and offensive material. They are concerned with the negative images that gangsta rap lyrics "glorify", and the influence of these images on the children of our society. These concerns are valid, and citizens and leaders alike should become familiar with these arguments.
against gangsta rap. However, much of the focus of these arguments is on the messengers of gangsta rap, particularly the means these artists use to express their messages, such as their offensive language, as opposed to the actual messages that gangsta rap sends to the public. Critics of gangsta rap normally ignore, or simply miss the messages found in the lyrics because of the shocking means used to express the messages. I will introduce some of these arguments against gangsta rap and give my own counterarguments as to how citizens, and especially politicians, skirt the issues presented in gangsta rap lyrics by attacking the medium in which these issues are vocalized.

The Senate Subcommittee on Juvenile Justice recently conducted hearings into the inflammatory content of gangsta rap lyrics in an effort to determine "what effect, if any, do brutally violent, vulgar, and sexist music lyrics have on our nation's children, and what, if anything, are we--in Congress, in the industry, and in society--prepared to do about it"-- Senator Carol Moseley-Braun (Brown 3). Although these hearings seem to be a good idea, all they have really amounted to is a venue for politicians to vent their frustration and anger about the language used in gangsta rap. For example, during these hearings, Senator Herb Kohl stated that, "Our topic for today is 'Gangsta Rap'--and other popular music that is violent, racist, anti-semitic, sexually graphic, or demeaning toward women." Kohl asserts that these rappers "ought to be ashamed of what they are teaching our children" (Brown 3).
The issue that Kohl misses is the fact that these rappers are not trying to teach our children anything; rather, they are trying to send a message to us, the general public, and more importantly, to the leaders of our society, in order to draw attention to the plight in urban society. These rappers write such "offensive" lyrics as a reflection of the environment in which they grew up. These politicians, and a large portion of the general public, are shocked, angered, or ashamed by the lyrics in gangsta rap. What they should be shocked, angered, or ashamed by are the conditions of the urban ghetto, and the fact that many of these same politicians are not doing anything to remedy the problems found in this harsh environment.

In fact, some politicians that publicly condemn gangsta rap and the message it sends to our youth, also have voted against some social policies that would have helped the urban population. According to Michael Eric Dyson, "Bennet and Dole, (who are against gangsta rap and try to censor it as well as other forms of entertainment) have put up roadblocks to many legislative and political measures that would enhance the fortunes of the black poor they now claim in part to speak for" (184). Unfortunately, Dyson does not site specific measures that Dole and Bennet voted against. Thus, we do not know if there were other aspects of these measures that could be seen as unsatisfactory.

However, one must question why these politicians are truly against gangsta rap - because of its offensive lyrics, or because the artists are easy targets. By attacking the artists, these
politicians do not have to try and solve the problems outlined in gangsta rap. Again, these critics focus on the messengers of gangsta rap, rather than what the messengers are saying.

In the same Senate hearings, Dr. C. Delores Tucker, Chair of the National Political Congress of Black Women, spoke against the misogynist lyrics of gangsta rap and labeled the music "pornographic smut." She argues that,

The misogynist lyrics that glorify violence and denigrate women is nothing more than pornographic smut...It coerces, influences, encourages, and motivates our youth to commit violent behavior, use drugs and abuse women through demeaning sex acts...No one and no industry should be allowed to continue the social and psychological poisoning of the young minds of this nation that is occurring with gangsta rap. (Brown 4)

Do these lyrics really coerce, influence, encourage and motivate our youth to commit such vulgar crimes, or is there a problem hidden deeper beneath the surface? The two parent family of the '50s and '60s is not a very plausible option for many in today's society, and is most certainly not an option for African-American women in the urban ghettos. The fact of the matter is, most of the urban youth do not have a visible male role model living in their households, or even in their neighborhoods. The lack of a father figure for many of the urban youth leads these children and adolescents to a lack of respect for other sexes, cultures, and races. There is no excuse for using misogynistic language; however, this lack of a male role model is one explanation as to why many gangsta rap artists do use this type of language.

Dr. Tucker states that gangsta rap influences, encourages, and motivates youth to commit violent behavior and use drugs.
However, Dr. Tucker fails to realize that violent crime was increasing in the '70s and peaked in 1980, prior to gangsta rap. Violent crime reached a new peak in urban areas in 1992, but one must question if there is truly a causal relationship between this peak and gangsta rap. With the rise of drugs in the '80s, drug gangs and drive by shootings soon followed, one of the major causes for the rise in violent crime (Walker 6). Elliot Currie points out that inner city neighborhoods suffered a complete economic disaster in the 1980s. Federal aid for low-income housing fell by 67 percent in the 1980s, helping to create a new crisis in homelessness. Federal revenue-sharing funds for cities disappeared completely, as did urban development action grants (Currie 16). Rather than condemning gangsta rap as a cause of our country's drug and crime problem, leaders need to examine the root of these problems, inadequate social programs focusing on urban society.

Michael Eric Dyson refers to the misplacement of blame for urban problems on gangsta rap artists instead of inadequate social development policies numerous times in his text, but states it best in the preface:

But the vilification that gangsta rap has endured, and its mostly young black male artists right along with it, is far out of proportion to the problems it presents. The demonization of gangsta rappers is often a convenient excuse for cultural and political elites to pounce on a group of artists who are easy prey. The much more difficult task is to find out what conditions cause their anger and hostility. (xiii)

In order to truly help the urban population, leaders need to focus on why these problems have festered within the urban
society. The problems that gangsta rap artists rap about are not ones that they caused, but problems in urban society that our leaders have neglected and ignored.

Clearly gangsta rap can have negative effects, especially on children. Tom Packer, an employee of the Juvenile Services in St. Petersburg does raise an important issue about the negative effects of gangsta rap when he states, "gangsta rap by itself doesn't cause someone to go out and shoot someone, but it can cause problems when added to some of the obstacles that kids have today" (Green 13). Gangsta rap lyrics could certainly be detrimental to an African-American adolescent's self-image and/or lifestyle. Without the proper guidance from role models, children can easily interpret gangsta rap lyrics to mean that using drugs or committing violent acts is acceptable. And unfortunately, many African-American adolescents do not have the appropriate role models to teach them that violence and drug use is wrong.

However, because not enough attention is being paid to the fact that violence, drug use, and the abuse of women are festering problems in the ghetto, these problems will continue, and gangsta rap artists will continue to rap about them. A vicious cycle will continue. Without leaders and citizens taking action to improve the conditions of contemporary urban society, this cycle will be perpetual.

But, it is very important to remember that by banning or censoring gangsta rap, these problems will not be solved.
Rather, they will be ignored even more because no one will be drawing attention to them. By creating social policies and taking an active role in transforming the ghettos, leaders and citizens can improve this sector of society greatly. The debate about gangsta rap will come to an end only when the festering problems within the urban community cease to exist.

The debate still goes on, though, and opposition to gangsta rap and the message that it sends is not a racial opposition, for there is much opposition to gangsta rap in the African American population. This rift in the African American population is interesting because this rift is similar to the one between the non-violent protestors and the Black militants of the Civil Rights Movement. The rift in the Civil Rights movement was concerned with the ideologies involved, although music went hand in hand with the non-violent ideology. However, the rift in today's African American population is not in ideology, but in perceptions of gangsta rap music.

Many African-Americans feel that gangsta rap is destructive for several reasons: 1) the lyrics present stereotypes of black culture that are inaccurate, 2) the lyrics perpetuate negative self-images of African-Americans, and, 3) overall, the music is detrimental to our youth. In this section, I have included many different arguments from within the African American community and once again, it should be clarified that these arguments are arguments against the messengers of the urban community, the voice of the urban population, as opposed to arguments against
the problems within the urban society.

Tony Green, of the St. Petersburg Times, writes that the voices expressing the greatest concern and outrage about gangsta rap are coming from the African-American community - from civic leaders, members of the media, educators and even those in the music industry. He writes,

All are saying roughly the same thing: That gangsta rap paints an inaccurate and offensive portrait of black life, reinforces stereotypes among whites, aggravates problems already within the African-American community and perpetuates negative self-images among African-Americans. One of the sorest points among critics of gangsta rap is the artists' casual use of words like 'nigger' and 'bitch' when referring to each other.

The portrait of black life that gangsta rap artists paint in their music may seem offensive and inaccurate to critics because of the differences in the lives the two groups lead. If these critics lived in the ghettoes, they, too, would paint a different portrait of black life. Gangsta rap artists are not trying to portray African Americans in a negative light, it is simply the only portrait of black culture they know. If this portrait reinforces stereotypes among whites, then it is the job of our leaders and citizens to change that perception in both the eyes of whites, and urban African-Americans.

Artist Spike Lee blames gangsta rap for the increasing high school drop-out rate among African Americans (Brown 8). Scholars Lankshear and McLaren retort that "there is good reason for schooling having become strongly disvalued by those who have long experienced it as a route to inevitable failure and disadvantage" (Brown 8).
Many critics associate problems within urban society to gangsta rap music, when in fact, these problems have been present all along, and are getting worse because no one has done anything to alleviate these problems. More young African Americans might stay in school if our politicians and community leaders gave more attention and funding to education in urban communities. Specifically, these leaders might focus on the quality of teachers in the education system, or perhaps focus on non-conventional methods of teaching or non-traditional subject material that might stimulate urban youth to embrace education. Regardless, the point is that no one has offered any proof of a causal relationship between increased drop-out rates and gangsta rap. One might offer the explanation that there are problems within the education system itself, as well as problems within the urban community that I will discuss later, that lead to increasing drop-out rates.

So, why does the rift within the African American population lead to the attack of gangsta rap artists, rather than the problems that they describe in their music? Dr. Monroe Little, Director of Afro-American Studies at Indiana University at Indianapolis, states that the backlash follows a familiar pattern:

When faced with a problem, black people will lash out at each other rather than at the root of their difficulty. In this case, figures in the black community choose to attack black artists, rather than the system that produces the conditions they rap about. (Lieberman)

Thus, this backlash draws attention away from the root of the
problems described in the message of gangsta rap music, problems that I intend to outline while getting at the heart of the message of gangsta rap music.

One of the major concerns from critics of gangsta rap is the fact that lyrics influence people, especially children, and gangsta rap's negative lyrics can have a negative effect on children. This is a valid and very important concern. For our children to elucidate the right message from this music, parents need to understand the true message of gangsta rap so that they can explain to their children what the lyrics are trying to express. In order to better educate our youth about the problems of our society, and what they, as future leaders, can do to solve them, parents and leaders alike must first understand the message of gangsta rap, and where it stems from.

Critics of gangsta rap fail to pursue an understanding of why gangsta rap was created, and why it has become such a social phenomenon. Most people do not ask themselves why a certain type of music becomes popular, or what the purpose of the music is, but these are invaluable questions to ask and answer. Michael Eric Dyson states that "gangsta rap is largely an indictment of mainstream and bourgeois black institutions by young people who do not find conventional methods of addressing personal and social calamity useful" (185). Gangsta rap was created by artists who were fed up with the conventional methods of trying to call attention to their community. Gangsta rap artists are using their music as a voice for the African-American urban
community, a population that has been ignored for long enough. Darryl James, the publisher of the music periodical Rap Sheet, commented that "art, especially musical art, has always been an expression of the frustrations of a people, particularly African Americans, in this nation" (Lieberman). James' statement rings true, especially when one thinks about the role of music in the Civil Rights Movement. Music has been used time and time again as a medium of expression for African-Americans throughout history.

According to Dr. Monroe Little, the message of gangsta rap is one that has been used before throughout history. He states,

[The message of gangsta rap] is reflective of a 300-, 400-year-old race war we've been fighting in this country. The closet thing I can think of is to look at what generations of civil unrest has done to children in Northern Ireland, where you're living in a high-pressure environment where you can get wasted in an instant. It's the same thing you would see during WWI and II; where there is a coarsening of language and relationships between the sexes, and a denigration of the things you see around you. A lot of rappers don't know the historical baggage they are at the tail-end of. They think their situation is just a matter of "me and my homies" when in actuality it goes back to about 1619. (Lieberman)

The fact that most rappers do not realize the historical baggage that accompanies their message rings true in the fact that the claim of the majority of rappers is that their art merely imitates life (Clark 13). The message of gangsta rap may not even be apparent to the artists; they may just be rapping about what they know, and are unaware that they are giving a voice to a neglected community.

What most people neglect in their belligerent attacks
against music that portrays life in such a negative light, is the message of gangsta rap and its testimony of violence, drugs, gangs, fear, and poverty that pervade and engulf contemporary urban society. The message of gangsta rap is for us, as members of our society, to "Pay Attention!" The lyrics in gangsta rap are not used to hurt or offend; they are a cry for help from a population that has not had a voice prior to gangsta rap. Instead of focusing on the fact that gangsta rap lyrics are violent and portray negative images, parents and leaders alike should focus on why these negative aspects have become a festering problem in the urban society, and what we, members of the larger society, can do about them. In helping all citizens understand the message of gangsta rap today, maybe they can help to transform our society, and can learn how music can be an important indicator of what is wrong in our society.

When gangsta rappers are asked why their message is sent in such an offensive manner, many respond that their lyrics are not offensive. Greg Hunt, of the St. Petersburg rap group 3BOK stated, "curse words are nothing more than a tool to express anger. And what we're expressing is what we see day to day, and what we would like to see tomorrow." (Green) Similarly, Eazy-E stated that his lyrics "are more like bulletins from the bullet-ridden ghetto streets" (Kot). Gangsta rap artists do not find their lyrics offensive because most of them were socialized quite differently than most members of the larger society. Basically, gangsta rappers tell it like they see it.
When many artists, scholars, and citizens alike look past the shock value of gangsta rap lyrics, they find the message that gangsta rap sends to the public. For example, Sherry Gendelman, a concerned citizen wrote a letter to the editor of *The San Francisco Chronicle* expressing why gangsta rap is important. She argues,

Rap and "gangsta rap" provide a voice that speaks viscerally for a community under siege...The immediate victims of the politics of greed and meanness are the poor, the disenfranchised, and people of color. While gangsta rap is not necessarily a call to arms, it is a very honest cultural expression of the profound pain and violent experience of too many African-Americans. If it offends us, insults us, or scares us, it is because the lives of the people from this community are very scary indeed.

On a similar note, Darryl James states that "rap music and the hip-hop culture sprung from a portion of the population that had been left out of the American dream" (Lieberman). Gangsta rap stems from the disenfranchised, the poor, those people left out of the American dream. From this population, one finds the message of gangsta rap, which is simply this: the members and leaders of our society have turned their back on contemporary urban society and have disassociated themselves with this community, and the urban community are tired of our attitude toward them. Because we have turned a deaf ear and closed our eyes to the problems within the ghettos, gangsta rap artists have used their music and lyrics to make us hear them. They have used their videos and album covers to make us see them. They will be ignored no longer, and neither will the community that they represent.
But why then, is the message so clouded, ignored, or misunderstood? First, some scholars state that society would rather turn a deaf ear to the problem, and blame the messenger. Dr. Little states that,

The music is a reflection of the conditions that rappers have seen themselves. Society has a limited ear as far as what it wants to hear and it's fashionable to attack rap right now. And with rappers being from an urban environment, they are easy targets. It's a case of blaming the messenger (Lieberman).

Barryl James states that it is not surprising to watch members of our society blame the music expression of a generation of urban youth for the unravelling of our social fabric (Lieberman). Members of our society would rather ignore the core issue sent in gangsta rap's message and attack the way that that message is sent.

Second, because of much of the media attention that shows gangsta rap in a negative light, citizens of our society tend not to delve any deeper into the issue. Dyson states that,

While gangsta rap takes the heat for a range of social maladies from urban violence to sexual misconduct, the roots of our racial misery remain buried beneath moralizing discourse that is confused and sometimes dishonest. (178)

People take arguments condemning gangsta rap at face value, rather than questioning the cause of the anger, frustration, violence and sexism found in the lyrics.

The final reason that the message of gangsta rap is not always heard or understood is the issue of censoring gangsta rap. Debates about censoring the language of gangsta rap has taken the focus off of the message of gangsta rap and placed it on the
means of expressing that message. During the debates about censoring the lyrics, the message of gangsta rap gets glossed over, and, thus, the public does not receive the real impact of the lyrics. Too much attention is given to the language of the lyrics, and not enough to the meaning of the lyrics, what the lyrics have to say.

Many radio stations and African-American magazines have censored either record ads that feature weapons or songs that have explicit sexual lyrics or refer to drug abuse. Civil Rights leader the Reverend Al Sharpton endorsed the move. He stated that, "You have the right to speak, but not to shout 'Fire!' in a crowded theater. Some records are yelling 'Shoot!' in neighborhoods crowded with guns." After his radio station censored certain music and record ads, Mark Gunn, KACE music director had many African-Americans come forward and state that they had said something that had been on their minds for a long time (Green 13).

Tony Green of the *St. Petersburg Times* raises an interesting question regarding this censorship: "Is all the tough talk, the pulling of songs, advertising and videos, really a positive step toward solving social problems, or is it just plain censorship, a case of taking the easiest steps, knocking off the easiest targets?" Clearly censoring gangsta rap will not be a positive step in solving social problems. Most likely, censorship of gangsta rap, which is used as an expressive tool by African-American artists, will be seen by those in the urban population
as another oppressive blow to African Americans. Censorship of
gangsta rap will only widen the gap between the urban population
and the larger society, as well as foster more of a feeling of
separation between the urban population and other African-
Americans, in addition to continuing separation between the urban
population and whites. Michael Eric Dyson points out that, "A
crucial distinction needs to be made between censorship of
gangsta rap and edifying expressions of civic responsibility and
community conscientiousness" (182-83). Unfortunately, that
distinction has yet to be made.

Because of these prohibitive factors, it is clear why the
message of gangsta rap has not been given its due attention.
First, society has always turned a deaf ear to this population,
and once gangsta rappers got society's attention, leaders and
citizens were appalled at the language that the artists used;
thus, these leaders and citizens attacked the messengers, rather
than the problems outlined in the message. Second, many of the
members of our society are offended by the lyrics of gangsta rap,
and take arguments against these lyrics at face value, rather
than actually focusing on why gangsta rap artists use such
language, and what issues are found within the lyrics. Finally,
much of the message is glossed over by the attention given to the
language of the lyrics, rather than what the lyrics have to say.

After discovering the message found within gangsta rap
lyrics, one can easily understand the importance of acting on
this knowledge. I stated earlier that it was vital for parents,
citizens, and leaders to become informed of gangsta rap's message, in order to fully understand why the message is spread with such anger and volatile attitudes, so they can then explain this message to the youth of our society. Because of the negative attention that gangsta rap has been given by media, politicians, and citizens, most parents do not want their children to listen to, or even have access to gangsta rap. However, when a gangsta rap album is so popular that it attains the number one position on the Billboard charts in its first week of release, as Coolio's "Gangsta's Paradise" did, it is obvious that a majority of our youth population, white and black, are listening to what gangsta rap has to say. And if the leaders and concerned members of our society misunderstand what gangsta rap is truly saying, then the youth of our society will also misunderstand, which can have a detrimental effect to their lifestyle if they are influenced by the negative lyrical medium of gangsta rap.

If our youth is listening to gangsta rap, which is apparent, rather than making this music the forbidden fruit— which probably will make the youth want to listen to it even more—leaders, parents, and citizens should make it their duty to educate and inform our society's youth of the message that these rappers are truly trying to convey. The media, politicians, and citizens alike have given gangsta rap a bad name because of its explicit lyrics that "praise" violence, drug use, and the abuse of women. A majority of gangsta rap songs do include these types of lyrics,
which should raise the question of why this particular type of music focuses the thrust of its attention on these negative aspects of our society. Is it simply because the music is shocking, and therefore artists think it will appeal to audiences, or is it because these negative subjects are what these artists truly know because of the violence, abuse, and drug use that occurs in their neighborhoods everyday?

In hindsight, one can see the impact that gangsta rap has had on our society; unfortunately, many view this impact in a negative light, as exemplified by the many arguments against gangsta rap lyrics because of their misogynistic and violent language and references to drug use. Granted, one certainly cannot excuse the use of misogynistic and abusive language in gangsta rap music. However, one can explain this language with the fact that gangsta rap was created in the urban ghettos, an area where male role models are lacking, and thus, many of the urban youth have not been taught to respect other sexes and/or cultures and races.

But we cannot place the blame for the objectification and abuse of women in the urban society alone. The larger society also takes a hand in this objectification with its views toward women. These views are exemplified in many television and magazine advertisements that exploit women's bodies. And the abuse of women can be seen in our society as a whole with the numerous acts of domestic violence that are reported each year, as well as the numerous shelters for battered women that one can
find throughout our nation. The urban society is not the only one with this lack of respect for women; however, more attention is given to the urban population because of the way this lack of respect is expressed in gangsta rap music.

I do not agree with the language that these artists use, nor do I agree with their negative portrayal of women and other races and cultures. However, if our society is offended by this language, and feels that it is detrimental to our youth, then something needs to change in the ghetto itself. Censorship of the music will not help the problem, rather, it will hide the problem, and the urban youth will still be exposed to the negativity, violence, and sexism in the urban community.

Although the portrait of urban life that gangsta rap lyrics paint is not a positive one, the music still plays a vital role, not only in contemporary urban society, but in the larger society as well. Gangsta rap music functions as a plea for help to citizens, leaders, and politicians at large. The music not only challenges the system, but also challenges us, as citizens and leaders, to focus on the conditions that infest the urban society, conditions which led to the birth of gangsta rap. Michael Eric Dyson comments that rappers have come to be representatives of the members of their society that have been swallowed by urban fate. These victims do not have a voice, and so rappers have used their rage to allow these previously silent victims to be heard. (177) Gangsta rap music not only acts as a means of expressing dissention with American society, it also
acts as a social documentary of the bleak conditions of contemporary urban society. If we are shocked by the music, we should be shocked by what the music says, not by how the music is stated.

Clearly this music has more substance than just abusive, offensive lyrics which shock and anger people. Gangsta rap has a clear message beneath the offensive language that it uses to deliver this message. However, due to the poor education in the ghettos, many of the contemporary urban youth do not know how to express themselves in any other way than by what they hear every day in the streets and in their homes. This language, for many in our society, is offensive language. And if this language is offensive to members of society, then it is their responsibility to educate the youth of contemporary urban society, and show this population that there is a culture that is more positive, and far better than the one that is now in existence in the urban ghettos.

Gangsta rap music is a force in today's society that brings attention to a population that has been ignored for far too long. Gangsta rap lyrics speak of the injustices of contemporary urban society, and of the disenfranchisement of this population. Dyson concludes that,

At its best, this music [gangsta rap] draws attention to complex dimensions of ghetto life ignored by many Americans. Of all the genres of hip-hop -- from socially conscious rap to black nationalist expressions, from pop to hardcore -- gangsta rap has most aggressively narrated the pains and possibilities, the fantasies and fears, of poor black urban youth" (184-85).
On a similar note, Greg Kot of the Chicago Tribune, stated that hip hop was a voice that spoke to blacks and whites alike. He states that "it [hip hop and rap] could not be denied, and it raised awareness of the African-American community in mainstream society like few art forms before it" (0). Although the message of gangsta rap may not be delivered in a positive manner, there is clearly an apparent message within, and beneath, the abusive lyrics of gangsta rap, a message that merits the attention of our society.

Once leaders and citizens of our society recognize the message of gangsta rap, they must then answer this call to arms to help alleviate the conditions that suffocate the urban population. This task is an enormous one. But, when trying to help individuals, leaders must first understand these individuals by learning about their perspectives, their motivations, and their fears. For leaders that have had little to no contact with the urban population, this will be an extremely difficult task. The only contact that most leaders and citizens of our society have with the urban population is through gangsta rap music. Studying gangsta rap music is the first step for these leaders and citizens in gaining a better understanding of the urban population as a whole. Because of music's important role in the urban community, in studying this music, leaders can learn about different perspectives, stereotypes, and other aspects of the urban culture on a general level, which is the first step to gaining a better understanding of individuals within the urban
society when leaders come face to face with its members. Thus, gangsta rap can be utilized as a learning tool to teach leaders about the urban culture on a general level, so that these leaders can gain insight into what will motivate people within the culture, as well as insight into some of the perspectives of the urban population. Studying gangsta rap music is the first step for leaders and citizens to put themselves in the shoes of the contemporary urban population.

After actively listening and studying gangsta rap music, leaders must then ask themselves if this music can then somehow be used in a positive manner. When journalist Pete Clark of the Evening Standard asked gangsta rap artist Coolio if gangsta rap could be used as a force of good, his response was not a positive one, although, but insightful and powerful. He responds,

Music can help but ultimately it starts in the home. So many kids are growing up without love in the home, so they're not taught any morals or values. That is the real problem. The real problem is not in the music. Or even television. America has no moral values. People that are supposed to be leaders are doing all kinds of shit. It's going to get worse before it gets better.

Coolio makes a good point in saying that many people that are supposed to be leaders are not doing their jobs; this is why gangsta rap music continues to offend, because leaders have not done anything about the horrible conditions of urban society. And until something is done about these conditions, gangsta rap will continue to be a prevalent force in our society.

Therefore, members of our society should try to utilize gangsta rap in a positive way, whether it be for teaching
purposes or gaining exposure to a different culture. Some scholars have already proposed ideas for such positive uses. In his paper, "Unwrapping Rap: A Literacy of Lived Experience", Stephen G. Brown asserts that incorporating gangsta rap into classrooms would be a novel idea in order to enhance and increase cultural literacy (7). Brown states that "the homogeneous discourse practices of the dominant culture are perpetuated with the pedagogical structure of schooling today while repressing the informal oral literacy that students find in their own communities" (8). Similarly, Robert Pattison speaks of the "split between formal and informal discourse, between the language of power and the language of the streets" (Brown, 7). Urban youth cannot relate to the conventional subjects and practices found in schooling because their experiences are quite different from the dominant culture that conventional methods of schooling are based on.

In order to better teach the youth of today, we must understand what happens in their communities and in their lives. In leadership classes, one is taught that leadership is learned through experience. The only experience that urban youth have is that which is reflected in gangsta rap lyrics. If we, as teachers and scholars, want to put a positive spin on their education, experiences, and consequently, on their lives, we need to confront their experiences from the ghetto, we need to talk about gangsta rap. Gangsta rap music brings a unity to the urban youth because they can relate to the experiences that gangsta
rappers describe in their lyrics. Educators of urban youth can gain an appreciation of urban life, and thus, student experiences, by studying gangsta rap. From this appreciation, these educators can then decide from an individual perspective what will help the students in the learning process and what would be the best approach to take in teaching. Youth of urban communities are more likely to embrace education and thus, learn more, from someone that they can relate to, or rather, someone that knows what goes on in the students' communities, than from someone who ignores gangsta rap and its message.

Certain rap groups are also trying to use their music as a positive force in society. For example, the Universal Zulu Nation, a nation-wide rap coalition including members such as Ice-T, Queen Latifah, Ice Cube, and A Tribe Called Quest, are pursuing an agenda of activities usually not associated with rappers. They have plans for mentoring programs and tutoring sessions, and their leaders envision ties with the local government for community projects, and they want to reach out to troubled young people (Simmons, 2/18/96). Damon X, leader of the Northeast Ohio Chapter of the Universal Zulu Nation stated that, "They [troubled youth] aren't really going to listen to their teachers. They might listen to us." Before rap hit the airwaves, it toiled in the ghettos of the South Bronx, where street gangs switched from violence to peacefully battling each other with competing rap, dance and graffiti art skills, and Damon said that the Zulu Nation would like to see rap and other
Thus, it seems that although gangsta rap has been perceived in a negative light, there are some positive uses for the music. Besides being a means of expression of anger and dissent and a means of calling attention to urban society, gangsta rap can also be utilized as a teaching tool in urban schooling. Until our leaders focus on the problems of contemporary urban society, concerned citizens, scholars, and educators must not ignore gangsta rap, but rather, "face the music", and find positive uses for gangsta rap that will help urban youth, such as those ideas presented by Stephen Brown and Damon X.
Conclusions

The non-violent protestors of the Civil Rights Movement found in their music, a sense of healing and of cohesion within their group, a group of blacks and whites alike, fighting the injustices of a supposedly just society. They used the Freedom Songs to express dissention with the system, to disseminate information to other movement participants, and to bind the group together. The black militants of the '60s in the Civil Rights Movement did not use music as a form of their expression; rather, their silence, an absence of music, said it all. Today, gangsta rappers are a fusion of the ideologies of non-violent protestors and the black militants of the Civil Rights Movement. Gangsta rap music contains the vigorous anger, frustration, and violence of the black militant ideology, and the musical expression of non-violent protestors. Gangsta rappers, and the population that their music speaks to and for, use this music to express their anger and to rebel against a society that not only lacks understanding of that anger, but ignores the root cause of that anger. Our society has turned its back on the urban ghetto populations, and because the contemporary urban society does not have a political voice, members of this population have used music to gain their voice in our society. Unfortunately, it seems that leaders of our country, as well as our citizens and the media, have turned a somewhat deaf ear.
Implications of this study on Leadership

Clearly the music of the Civil Rights Movement had an impact on the members of the movement. In reviewing the testimonies of leaders and followers within the movement, not only did the music in conjunction with the non-violent ideology have an overwhelming effect on them in shaping their attitudes and beliefs, the music also helped to bind the group together, and was a help in gathering support for the movement. The music helped to give power in numbers to voices that had been singing only to themselves for eighty years prior to the movement. The music allowed them to speak about the injustices that all African Americans had felt for so long. The idea of equality gave the movement its legitimacy, the music gave the movement its power.

Thus, the music also had an impact, although an indirect one, on the overall society. President Johnson signed the Voters' Rights Act, there was desegregation in schools, at lunch counters, and, eventually, in the work force. Dr. King spoke of how the music was the "soul" of the movement. Dr. Spenser argues that the music was the "emotional charge", the "driving force" behind the movement. Without this "driving force", without its "soul", the movement could not have had such an impact on society.

As the evidence has shown, gangsta rap music has had a huge impact on our society. Gangsta rap is a useful resource for society in giving insight into the concerns, fears, and anger of the urban population, and, most importantly, the lyrics paint a
cruel but accurate picture of life in contemporary urban society. Gangsta rap acts as a social commentary, outlining the numerous problems that engulf the ghettos, such as violence, drug use, sexual abuse, and the tremendous need for role models within this urban society.

However, research is lacking on how the music actually affects the participants of contemporary urban society. More studies need to be conducted involving actual members of this society and gathering their opinions on this music which acts as their voice. Do these members want gangsta rap music as their voice? Do they have any alternative means to express their concerns and dissent for their own society? If so, what would these means be, and would these means be as effective or call as much attention to the population as gangsta rap does?

Music clearly acts as an interconnecting factor between the three circles of leadership. I have shown how leaders, participants, and society were all affected by the music of the Civil Rights Movement, and, how this music led to change in African Americans, and change in society. After recognizing these effects of music within the Civil Rights Movement, the definition of its role in the movement and the importance of that role become clear.

The role of music in contemporary urban society is also clear. Gangsta rap acts as a social commentary for members of urban society. The music expresses their rage, anger, and frustration with American society. Gangsta rap also gives
insight to our citizens and leaders regarding the problems within
the urban community.

Gangsta rap has had a huge impact on American society. However, not enough research has been conducted to make conclusions regarding this music's effect on the leaders and followers within the movement. Perhaps the only way one will be able to discover these effects is in hindsight, thirty years from now, after much extensive research has been conducted, as it has been for the Civil Rights Movement.

Although I have tried to compare the role of music within these two movements, it has proven somewhat difficult to do so because of a lack of research focusing on the participants of the gangsta rap movement. Nevertheless, Bernice Johnson describes the importance of music to the understanding of the Civil Rights Movement, a statement that can easily be related to gangsta rap music. Johnson believes that

oral evidence is essential to historical investigation. In the case of the Civil Rights Movement, its songs provide data of high historical value and are necessary for an understanding of the movement and the relationships between the major actors, reactors, observers, and affected institutions (6).

Thirty years from now, scholars could reiterate this point in regards to gangsta rap music. Studying this music is necessary for an understanding of the movement and of our society in the close of the twentieth century.

Major attention has been given to gangsta rap because of its negative language and subject matter, and the major "actors" are those rappers that have come from the ghettos and have brought a
piece of ghetto life to the surface for society to view. Politicians, citizens, and the media, who can be viewed as "reactors", are reacting to gangsta rap music negatively because the music has not yet been used effectively enough to convey this message to the public.

Institutions may be affected by gangsta rap twenty years from now. Perhaps educators will take Stephen Brown's advice and use gangsta rap as a teaching tool for cultural literacy. Regardless, the gangsta rap movement has not had the longevity that the Civil Rights Movement had, and therefore, not as many conclusions can be drawn regarding the role of music in gangsta rap as opposed to the role it played in the Civil Rights Movement.

However, this study has shown that music can act as a vital leadership resource. First, and foremost, music can be used as a means of expression of a group through several vocal members. African American culture has always used music to express emotions. Within the Civil Rights Movement, leaders and participants used music to rally support and to bind the group together with joy, to express their dissent for the racial inequality of our country, and to overcome their fear. Similarly, gangsta rap artists use their music as a means of expression. Some artists express their dissent for the system, others express their anger toward other cultures. Regardless of the emotion, during these two social movements, African Americans have used their respective music to express emotion.
Second, music can be used as a teaching device. Leaders of the Civil Rights Movement used the Freedom Songs to teach members of the movement to be strong and to vocalize what they wanted and believed in. Gangsta rap music is an invaluable resource to educators of inner-city children. As Stephen Brown points out, gangsta rap is a literacy of lived experience, and can be used in classrooms to bridge the gap between the language of the dominant culture, and the language of the streets.

Gangsta rap can also be valuable to leaders and citizens of our society. Gangsta rap music can teach members of our society about the social ills that created gangsta rap music. But these citizens then need to act on this knowledge.

Our country's political policies lack in support of trying to help remedy the urban plight that is running rampant today. Without focusing on the problems within urban society, specifically, those which can be helped by adequate social programming, our leaders have no hope of alleviating the problems within urban society. And, without hope of transforming the underclass in urban society, vulgar crimes will continue to be committed, not because of gangsta rap, but because of unemployment, drug use, and physical abuse, problems that our society's leaders need to address. A lack of social programming and interest on the part of our leaders is what leads the African American urban community through a downward spiral of violence, drug use, and the abuse of women.

However, because there is great opposition to gangsta rap
from African Americans, perhaps the rift in the black community prohibits the momentum that gangsta rap music is trying to gather. If the black militants had accumulated support and started making a rift in ideology with the non-violent protestors in 1960, five years before it actually did, the Civil Rights Movement might not have accomplished what it did. Perhaps this rift within the African American community now is what hinders the progress of effective leadership within contemporary urban society. Or, we may still live in a racist, bourgeoisie society where the upper-class society oppresses the lower-class.

Why contemporary urban society continues to have so many problems is a difficult question, one that cannot be answered in its entirety in this study, though I hope I have given some insight into this question. But until these problems are solved, gangsta rap music acts as a news bulletin for society. The angry lyrics of gangsta rappers are a wake-up call for leaders in our society—whether they be citizens or politicians—to take action. The music plays an active leadership role in speaking out for the citizens of urban society, and members of our society need to heed the calling of gangsta rap music.

Carawan, the editor of Sing for Freedom, makes a good point when he discusses how most of us take for granted the notion of adapting well-known songs to situations of the present because we were witnesses to the Civil Rights era. But, in many of the present situations of discontent, as I have shown, music is used as an outlet. The anger of a disgruntled urban population has
its greatest representation in its music. Music has not been forgotten by the citizens fighting the struggle of some grassroots leadership movements. It seems that some of our leaders have forgotten how important music is to these movements. As a reminder to these leaders, I think Reverend C.T. Vivian sums it up best when he claims:

I would think that a movement without music would crumble. Music picks up peoples' spirits. Anytime you can get something that lifts your spirits and also speaks to the reality of your life, even the reality of oppression, and at the same time is talking about how you can really overcome; that's terribly important stuff (Carawan 6).
Listed below are some of the gangsta rap lyrics that have offended members of the American population:

"I've got my 12-gauge sawed off
I'm 'bout to dust some cops off
Die, pit, die"
("Cop Killer", by Ice-T)

"I got a pocket full of rubbers
And my homeboys do too
So turn off the lights and close the do'rs
But for what, we don't love them 'ho's"
("Gin and Juice", by Snoop Doggy Dogg)

"Her body is beautiful, I'm thinking rape
She should not have her curtains open
That's her fate"
("Bone" by Bone Thugs-N-Harmony)

A suggestion for further research regarding this topic would be to trace a lyrical progression from the songs of the Civil Rights Movement, to the gangsta rap movement, including a historical background (political, economical, and social) of African American life throughout the three decades, with a particular focus on the role of the African American woman during this time period.

Below is a list of a few gangsta rap artists' albums that should also peak curiosity for future study:

1. Amerikkka's Most Wanted, by Ice Cube. This album includes the song, "The Nigga Ya Love to Hate," in which he demands to know "Why more niggas in the pen than in college?" He also raps about his attacks on the fairer sex in songs like "I'm Only Out for One Thing" (Dyson 173).

2. Death Certificate, by Ice Cube. This album includes songs about government corruption of black life ("I Wanna Kill Sam"), gang disputes ("Color Blind"), and tensions between blacks and Koreans ("Black Korea") (Dyson 174).

3. The songs "Don't Believe the Hype", which called Elvis a racist, and "911", which claimed that emergency calls from black neighborhoods were ignored, are brought to us by Public Enemy (Dyson 168).

4. The late gangsta rap artist, Eazy-E, left us with something to think about with his song, "Ask Somebody Who Ain't (If U Think the System's Workin'...), which is a narrative about a 35-year-old single mother struggling to feed her three children (Kot, 0).
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