Black Magnolias

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Editor's Note: An Introduction
by C. Liegh McInnis

This special issue of *Black Magnolias* focuses on the artistry and life of Prince Rogers Nelson. Literature, as a form of art, a tool of history, and a medium to convey information, has a more powerful impact when combined with the medium of music. Both literature and music are direct representations of what is occurring inside the human soul, its emotions and thoughts. Also, both have the ability to reproduce and convey the human trinity of mind, body, and soul in its primary, primitive, and original form with minimal loss in translation. This effective communication of the human condition is what creates the aesthetic pleasure and is the value of literature and music.

> It seems possible to me that some kind of graph could be set up using samplings of Negro music proper to whatever moment of the Negro's social history was selected, and that in each grouping of songs a certain frequency of reference could pretty well determine his social, economic, and psychological states at that particular period. From the neo-African slave chants through the primitive and classical blues to the scat-singing of the beboppers: all would show definite insistences of reference that would isolate each group from the others as a social entity (Jones/Baraka 65).

Over the past one hundred years, the combined medium of literature and music as popular music has reflected, affected, impacted, changed, molded, and shaped the very essence of social, political, economic, and religious beliefs, sentiments, and values, not to mention the interpersonal relationships, romantic and platonic, of mankind. One of the most influential and vivid examples of these musical poets, satirists, philosophers, and storytellers is Prince Rogers Nelson. For over thirty-five years, Prince Rogers Nelson single-handedly affected the deviation or, in many cases, total change of the ideas and beliefs of sexuality, race, class, and religion of a mass populous, not to mention his lifelong dedication to freedom, independence, creativity, and music, helping to define a place and system of lifestyle for a new generation of citizens based on individuality, cultural relevancy, and tolerance.

With a collection of scholars from various disciplines, this special issue tracks and attempts to analyze the meanings and transitions of Prince's lyrical work, musical progression, and fashion, taking into consideration that, to explore thoroughly Prince, one must realize his lyrics are but a particle of the interwoven package of music, fashion, and mythology that is Prince. The meanings of Prince's songs, his artistic theory, and his theology of life do not begin and end with his lyrics. Though the lyrics are the clearest points of reference for how Prince sees the world, there are many other aspects of his character that must be considered to gain a full understanding of his artistry. By studying Prince's work, we hope to accomplish five ultimate goals. One, we must understand that popular art is a gauge or a barometer for society. When we study popular artists, we are innately studying the periods of the artists, which provide a better understanding of our history and of humanity. Though we may not like the images or the messages of popular art, it does tell us something about the times in which it is created. Two, we plan to prove that Prince is a master lyricists whose work, if studied by following generations, can inspire greatness. Three, by applying a serious study to Prince, we hope to bridge the gap between fine art and folk art or serious art and leisure art to provide another vehicle where

African-American artists who are on the fringes of respectability will be given serious attention. Unlike the Beatles or Bob Dylan, rarely are African-American songwriters studied for their intellectual value. When we deny, ignore, or marginalize African-American intellect, we deny, ignore, and marginalize African-American humanity. Four, if art is ever going to move humanity to its highest point, we must begin to tell the truth that most academic or fine art was first folk or popular art. This act of separating fine or academic art from the masses is merely proof that artistic theory is more of a tool for cultural warfare than a tool that provides understanding. Instead of bridging gaps, artistic theory is often used to create gaps, to divide the haves from the have nots. And five, studying the artistry of Prince is a way to gauge the full realm of black diversity, which allows us to gauge the full realm of black humanity. African Americans cannot continue to allow our fear of white supremacy to suppress our diversity for, when we suppress our diversity, we suppress our humanity. The class and generation wars within and against the African-American community are always centered on art. As long as these divisions exist, African Americans will never be able to move forward. With all of that said, one must also know that our assertions are not intended as the gospel on how to listen to or interpret the artistry of Prince. To use Baraka's words, "Writing the book confirmed ideas that had been rolling around in my head for years and that now...there was a thrill to see my own ideas roll out, not always as 'precisely stated,' [but my ideas]...were forceful enough to convince me that I did know something about this music" (Jones/Baraka vii). If anything, our work is to be viewed as a conversation that presents common and varying views to the Prince literate or as an introductory guide to those new to the idea of Prince as a popular musician making a conscious effort to produce thought-provoking art for discussion and enlightenment.

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His Legacy Will Be Televised: Prince on the Small Screen
by RaShell Smith-Spears

I grew up believing that musician/artist Prince was of mixed origin, with one white parent and one African American parent. It was not until well into my adulthood, I learned that this racial heritage was a myth perpetrated by the musician. In creating such a persona, Prince was adding to the mystique that he has carefully crafted over the course of his career. According to C. Liegh McInnis in *The Lyrics of Prince Rogers Nelson*, Prince sought to create a multiplicity of personas to maintain control of his image in the face of an industry that manipulates the identity of artists (372). These personas, which scholar Nancy Holland says were "fluid, polymorphous, and always, always playful" helped to create the mystery surrounding the man and his music (334). They also worked, however, to create a vacuum that allows audiences to impart their own identity onto Prince. In many ways, he understood this, claiming in *Paisley Park: Eternal Celebration of Life and Music* that "Despite everything, no one can dictate who you are to other people" (qtd. in Holland 322). He understood that even as he worked to craft his own identity and personas, ultimately, people would see him as their own experiences prescribed. This is especially true in the way the popular discourse has handled his image on the small screen. Prince has not made many appearances on scripted television, with exceptions such as *The Muppets*, but on the episodes in which he or his image plays a prominent role, his persona has worked almost as a *Tabula Rasa*, a canvas upon which audiences can place their own needs and ideas onto him. Perhaps his role as a musician plays into this phenomenon because music has such an individualized and personal meaning for people. Additionally, music grants the artist space to speak one's truth and audiences the space to interpret those truths in a variety of ways. Judson Jeffries and Shannon Cochran explain that Prince was an artist who utilized this space to challenge his listeners to consider matters such as "masculinity, spirituality, politics, racial and gender equality, gang violence, sexuality, poverty, disease, and identity" (293). Advocating for such diverse issues easily allows audiences to associate Prince with a diversity, if not entirely different identities, of surely varying images. Much like his music, Prince's televisual presence portrays him as a cultural chameleon who brings added dimensions to the African American image as a whole. This multilayered persona functions in shows such as *Chappelle's Show, New Girl*, and *Black-ish* to shift cultural paradigms and to inspire personal and cultural growth. Certainly, such a shift is imperative when the mainstream discourse insists that African Americans can only occupy limited spaces within the society. These spaces work to classify the African American body as violent and primitive, one to be feared and thus in need of containment at best or termination at worst. Prince's televised personas work against these limitations to expand societal understanding of what it means to be Black, among other identities.

On comedian Dave Chappelle's sketch comedy series, *Chappelle's Show*, Prince's image is used to challenge audiences to re-imagine their already-established understandings of artistry and skill as well as gender. In the sketch "Charlie Murphy's True Hollywood Stories," comedian Charlie Murphy retells an incident that supposedly occurred with him, his brother Eddie, Prince, and their friends. He recounts that they attended a party at which they met Prince who invited them to come to his house to listen to music. While there, Prince (portrayed by Chappelle) became bored and suggested a game of basketball. Murphy and his crew found this to be hilarious but agreed to play. They were given shorts and t-shirts, but Prince and his crew played

in the jumpsuits and frilly shirts they wore to the party. Murphy joked that rather than playing Shirts v. Skins, they would be playing Shirts v. Blouses. As the game began, Prince and his crew devastated Murphy's team and afterward, he served them a breakfast of pancakes. Murphy's story forces audiences to re-evaluate how they conceptualize Prince as an artist. Prince's focus on his music is legendary, spending hours writing and playing. His mastery of multiple instruments would suggest his musical life was ubiquitous, leaving little time for anything else. This image of the single-minded artist is part of the reason for Murphy's laughter because it seems ridiculous for Prince to challenge him to a game of athletic skill. He even says, "This is gon' be some funny ass shit" ("Charlie Murphy"). The audience is in on the joke as well because although we are aware of Prince's musical expertise, we do not expect the musician to be good in athletics. However, we are deceived by our prejudices like Murphy when Prince dominates on the basketball court. Murphy is visibly working hard—he is sweating profusely, falling forward at times, and asking for a towel because he's hot, even in his sleeveless shirt and shorts—while Prince easily sails by him in a jumpsuit, frilly blouse, and heeled velvet boots. Further illustrating his ease in the game, Prince quotes song lyrics and movie lines and performs sexually suggestive dance moves during the plays. For Prince, his skill as an athlete is paramount to his skill as a musician. Murphy affirms this when he compares Prince to basketball player Charles Barkley and ultimately announces that Prince won the game in a landslide victory. He tells the audience to let Prince challenge them to a game of basketball but be sure to let their friends watch because it will be embarrassing ("Charlie Murphy"). Murphy is assured that Prince's athletic expertise will be able to match anyone else's. He says he learned a lesson that day never to judge a book by its cover.

Part of his judgment involved Prince's identity as a musician, but part of it was due to ideas about masculinity. Murphy begins his story within the context of androgyny, saying that men who looked the most feminine got all the women. He even acknowledges his own nod to androgyny mentioning the Jheri curl hairstyle he wore. But it is in his discussion of Prince and his crew that he is the most judgmental. He critiques Prince's outfit in the club as looking like something a figure skater would wear. He also notes he wore a perm and a mustache drawn on, implying an artificiality to his masculinity. To add to Murphy's description, Chappelle as Prince wears dark eyeliner and curls in his hair. Murphy speaks extensively about Micki Free, one of Prince's crew. As Murphy says people thought he was the new girl singer in the group Shalamar, the character is shown making alluring eyes, patting his long, curly hair, and striking effeminate poses. Compared to Murphy and his friends who are dressed in conventional suits and ties, standard wear for men, Prince and his crew are dressed outside the boundaries of masculinity. Prince's behavior is pushed further beyond that boundary when he claims he is bored immediately after Murphy states, "We were grooving with the crew. We had girls over there; it was a nice environment. It was tight" ("Charlie Murphy"). Although music and women would have been of interest in a typical masculine environment, Prince has no interest in pursuing those activities. (It should be noted that throughout the sketch, while women are nearly always in the vicinity and Murphy actively engages them, Prince never does.) He claims his boredom after pulling a sucker out of his mouth, an act that could be construed as childish or effeminate, but certainly not masculine. So, Murphy does not expect to lose the game to Prince because he thinks he is effeminate. In this instance, Murphy is relying on gender assumptions that preclude the masculinity of Prince. Even in calling Prince's team "The Blouses," he is categorizing him outside of manhood and delegitimizing him as a legitimate contender (this time

in basketball). However, when Prince wins, he dunks on Murphy's team and exclaims, "Game. Blouses," accepting Murphy's judgment and turning it on its head ("Charlie Murphy"). As an audience, we are forced to rethink our concepts of what it means to be masculine, to be a man. Can one still win in a physical contestation with a "typical man" if one wears blouses and eyeliner? The Prince character answers in the affirmative and critiques Murphy and those who think like him for their small-mindedness. After the game, he serves everyone pancakes and offers them grapes. We might think this further effeminizes the Prince character, but he does not serve with care and he proclaims that Murphy and his crew are "Bitches," which emasculates them for losing and perhaps for their prejudice. As an audience who identifies with Murphy and typical masculinity, we are indicted for our prejudices as well. This sketch challenges us to reshape our understanding of masculine (and feminine) and the limitations we attach to such definitions. When we only identify masculinity with physical violence and prowess, we leave no room for multiple ways of being, thus forcing individuals to function within an identity prescribed for them. We see these limitations manifesting in toxic masculinity, discriminatory policies and practices toward the LGBTQIA community, and at times, violence toward those who step beyond "acceptable" definitions of being. Needless to say, not only is this detrimental to the individual's sense of self, but it is an inauthentic experience for the social order. Society suffers for this narrow vision. As Prince's character charges, we must re-envision our ideas to include multiple perspectives of maleness, femaleness, blackness, ability, and sexuality, not only to avoid discounting individuals, but also to create spaces in which the individual can meet one's potential and, consequently, society can as well.

Although Prince's win at basketball is unexpected, there is a moment that appears especially unreal. When he makes the winning dunk, he hangs onto the basket for a moment, then releases it but remains in the air, floating. Slowly, he descends after he claims victory. This levitation speaks to the magical quality of Prince that is a part of many of his television portrayals. Perhaps he is never as magical, however, as in the Season 3 episode "Prince" of the Fox sitcom *New Girl*. In this episode, Prince, himself, actually guest stars. His portrayal as a musician and magical guru functions as an inspiration for personal growth for the characters in the series. In this episode, of which Prince asked to be a part and had significant input, the main characters, Jessica Day and Nick Miller, are dating but have yet to declare their love. On her way to a party at Prince's house, Jess's beauty is so overwhelming for Nick, he blurts out that he loves her, but Jess does not reciprocate the expression. She cannot understand her inability to express her love because she is sure she loves Nick. When Nick crashes the party, they both ultimately find themselves alone in the company of Prince. He discovers their conflict and mentors Jess to help her overcome her fear of telling Nick she loves him.

As a guru, he is all-knowing and able to assist Jess in becoming a more whole individual. Upon his initial appearance in the garden, he already knows that Nick and Jess need time to "freak out" about seeing him even though they only stare when he first speaks to them. They are paralyzed, unable to move voice or limb, but once he grants them permission to react, they both scream and jump, with Nick eventually fainting. But Prince's knowledge goes beyond what could have been gleaned simply from experience. He knows why Jess cannot tell Nick she loves him. He intuitively knows that she is afraid that the relationship will fail, but he must provoke Jess to come to this realization. Then, he must help her overcome her fear, knowing that she needs to change outside and inside to become a better person. To this end he gives her a

wardrobe make-over, dressing her in a velvet gown reminiscent of Greek goddesses; he teaches her to meditatively say "love" in a candle-filled room; he physically feeds her by making her eat pancakes; he plays her in ping-pong and forces her to accept defeat as he beats her handily; he shows her the beauty of life and nature through the flight of a butterfly; and he uses shock therapy by closing her in a small, scary, dark room until she overcomes her fear. Through all of Prince's actions, Jess is finally able to yell to Nick in a public venue that she loves him. Prince solves their problem. Each of his methods work on various aspects of her person—the physical, the mental, the emotional—to inspire her to move to a higher version of herself. The audience is also called on to grow, understanding through his methods, although comical, that the whole person must be addressed if one wants to "Fallinlove2night" (the title of the song he sings in the show). In the end, not only is she able to overcome her fear, but she is able to do things she did not think possible, like sing the words of Prince's new song which she had never heard it before. Thus, Prince's behavior in this episode is magical. The writers tap into the popular persona of Prince as a magical being; in fact, he is almost godlike. When Prince and Jess talk in the kitchen, she accidentally calls him stupid and immediately regrets it. He says he forgives her, and she sighs with relief, saying, "Oh my god. Thank god" ("Prince"). She practically calls him God; this is after he suddenly and quietly appears in the garden (read: Garden of Eden) where Jess is grappling with a knowledge she is not supposed to have yet (Nick's love). As previously mentioned, in god-like fashion, he is all-knowing, and he has the ability to command a butterfly to sit on his shoulder. When Jess is closed into the dark room alone, he suddenly appears in the room with her, providing the only light for her to see. Prince performs miraculous and wondrous acts, tapping into the magic of his person. This magical persona works to do more than entertain us as an audience, but it liberates Prince from the monolith of racial categories. Because he is seen as moving beyond Blackness, White audiences are able to relate to him, giving him **access** to create and sell musical styles that are often prohibited to Black artists, (i.e. White radio stations and White listeners).

Although the magic is flattering to his image and enhances the mystique of Prince, on some level, this image is troubling. Because of the context of Prince helping a predominately white group of friends find wholeness in themselves with absolutely no benefit of his own, there is a hint of the Magical Negro caricature here. The Magical Negro is a trope that imbues black people (usually men) with magical powers but no story life of their own. They use those powers to help the white protagonists overcome whatever difficulties they face. According to sociologist Matthew Hughey, "These powers are used to save and transform disheveled, uncultured, lost, or broken whites (almost exclusively white men) into competent, successful, and content people within the context of the American myth of redemption and salvation. It is this feature of the Magical Negro that some people find most troubling . . . He or she is also regarded as an exception, allowing white America to like individual black people but not black culture" (543). In this episode, Prince uses his magic to help Jess find wholeness which ultimately helps Nick. He also indirectly helps their friend Schmidt who initially wanted to use Prince and his party to find a better class of friends but learns at the party that the friends he has are what he actually needs and wants. Schmidt also finds wholeness. His aid to these White characters with no benefit of his own posits Prince in a role that disrupts the positive progress of interracial relations, even as it appears on the surface to encourage it.

Nancy Holland in "Prince: Postmodern Icon," writes that Prince's life and work causes us to deconstruct our understandings of race, gender, and sexuality (322). Similarly, McInnis argues that his earlier works and behavior called for audiences to blend notions of black and white to focus on the sound of the music rather than the race of the musician (373). Even within the "Prince" episode of *New Girl*, there is an attempt at the erasure of race. First, Nick flashes to a memory of his high school talent show when he dressed as Prince and sang "1999" poorly. Although he failed to rise to the talent of Prince, his imitation shows that he does not fail to see Prince, a black man, as an icon to be imitated regardless of race. In another example, Jess reveals her outfit for the party and asks Nick which shoes she should wear, the black ones or the white ones. She repeats "white or black" three times before her friend Cece tells her it's all wrong. She is wearing a metallic gold dress so both pairs of shoes seem fashionably inappropriate leading one to think there is a message in the shoe scene. Cece's declaration that it is all wrong is a declaration that placing black and white as a binary from which one must choose is also all wrong. Each of these instances would argue that considerations of race should not be a part of the discussion of an episode in which Prince himself had significant creative input. However, we cannot divorce the show from its context within American media. While the aim may have been to deconstruct ideals of race, the show still aired and used tropes within a social and political environment that is heavily influenced by a racial hierarchy that places African Americans in a subordinate class. Unchecked, and furthermore normalized on seemingly innocuous and progressive public media, these racialized ideals are reified and normalize discriminatory racial policies that negatively affect the lived experiences of real-life Black people.

That racial hierarchy is certainly a consideration in the portrayal of Prince in ABC's *Black-ish*. Filmed after his death as a tribute, within the episode "Purple Rain," Prince becomes an inspiration that enhances the individual to better the community. Through each family member's personal experience with Prince's music, they help build a connection to the artist and the younger generation so that they, too, can be inspired to do more and be more. The episode features preteen twins Jack and Diane Johnson who do not know Prince or his music. Alarmed at their ignorance, their father Dre, along with all the older members of the family, attempts to relay to the twins how Prince's music changed their lives for the better. Several members explore how Prince inspired them to realize their sexual selves. Dre is inspired by the song "Kiss," while their mother Rainbow is empowered in her sexuality by "Erotic City." Both explain that they would not have built their relationship and thus their family if they had not embraced the inspiration of the music. Because of this influence, the music holds a significant place in their lives.

Moreover, the episode functions to expand viewers' understanding of the depth and width of Prince's lyricism as a socio-political commentary as well. College student Zoe claims that Prince's "Sign o' the Times" pushed her to be a more active citizen in the world. In his music, she notes, he speaks of HIV/AIDS, gang violence, and other political issues that challenge her to see him as more than a musician of sexual music, but as someone who was socially aware, someone she could emulate. She, like Nancy Holland, sees his music as "a part of a living, complex social world, obviously much larger than [Prince's] own creations" (327). Similarly, the twins' grandfather, Pops, recognizes a social solidarity in Prince's "7." He also finds inspiration in Prince's struggles with the music company to wrest control of his music, refusing

to be controlled or owned by a corporation. Prince's music provides Pops with the courage to himself "throw off" the restrictive chains of his factory job and quit. In each instance, the individuals access Prince's music to help them see their place in the larger society and to discover what they can do to improve the lives of themselves and the community. Interestingly, this episode gives primacy to Dre's home life rather than including his work life. In most episodes, Dre presents the problems he has at home to his White colleagues at work, and they offer him advice that he sometimes follows and sometimes ignores. He does not take the problem of the twins' ignorance to the workplace this time. In fact, when he tells them at the end of the episode that he taught the twins about Prince, his colleagues are also ignorant, saying "Prince who?" and "Prince of what?" They are not a part of Prince's musical legacy, not privy to the knowledge of Prince's impact on the larger Black community. This idea is further supported by his Black colleague Charlie who appears dressed in a suit from "Raspberry Beret" and ready to explain Prince and the song as if he is already aware of the knowledge that their White colleagues do not have.

Ultimately, this episode is about establishing a cultural legacy and moving it forward. Maintaining and progressing a legacy is a vital endeavor for African Americans because of the history of racial animus and discrimination within America. As identity has been erased, creating a legacy and imparting it to the next generation is a way to reclaim one's own identity. Dre wants to leave a legacy for his children; Prince with all he represents is a part of that. His worry that the twins are unaware of that legacy is not trivial. It is tantamount to them not knowing their ancestors and essentially themselves. We see that in the beginning of the episode as several generations of the family are connecting through Prince's music. With the twins not knowing him, they are outside the family circle and, thus, are disconnected from their community. However, the episode ends with both twins realizing their own connections to Prince (and ultimately re-establishing ties to the community Their way to the man and by extension, the legacy, is different from their father's way or even the other members of the family, but they do find a link, a connection that speaks to the diversity of the total African American experience Additionally, the youngest child, Devonte, toddles among the group while the whole family is singing Prince's "Nothing Compares 2 U" and is so moved by the music that he tries to play the keyboard that his father is playing. Thus, we are assured that the legacy will continue. The persistence of the legacy or the connection to one's history encourages greater self-knowledge and self-love, especially as African Americans, engage in vastly white spaces which may seek to define them narrowly. Understanding the legacy also allows African Americans to realize as Prince's identity reveals that Black people are not monolithic and cannot be narrowly defined. Recognizing this reality enables them to embrace the ideological diversity of themselves, which can lead to the formation of more economic, educational, and social institutions that leads to an even greater sense of sovereignty.

Despite what the ignorance of Dre's White colleagues on *Black-ish* suggests, Prince found popularity among a diverse audience of people. His music in its myriad manifestations spoke to people on multiple levels. His appearance on the small screen which worked to shift paradigms and inspire growth, also spoke to people on multiple levels. Television is a powerful medium whose ubiquity allows it to reach myriad people. Prince's persona on the small screen is meaningful not only because of its reach, but also because it challenges established paradigms about Black identity. Furthermore, it reminds us of the manner in which Prince was purposeful in

establishing his own narrative, eschewing limited definitions of himself. His versatility allows him to live on; his example inspires African American creators to write, draw, and produce a diversity of images that shine a more authentic light on the Black race. And, it is this legacy we inherit from Prince that assures he will be a part of the lives of future generations.

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A Condemnation of Predatory Capitalism and Its Perpetuation:
Marxian Ideas Applied to Prince's "Golden Parachute"
by William Armstrong

German political philosopher Karl Marx and his colleague and collaborator Friedrich Engels were vociferous in their condemnation of entrenched capitalism in its many forms through their philosophy of Marxism. Marxism asserts that the state throughout history has been a device for the exploitation of the masses by a dominant class, that class struggle has been the main agency of historical change, and that the capitalist system, containing from the first the seeds of its own decay, will inevitably, after the period of the dictatorship of the proletariat, be superseded by a socialist order and a classless society. Marx and Engels argued that capitalism, by its very nature exploitative and victimizing, was designed to preserve a status quo by which those in positions of power maintained a stranglehold, not only on the financial superstructure of individual nations, but on the governments of those nations as well. In their book *The German Ideology* they eloquently give voice to this, condemning in no uncertain terms the ruthlessness and hard-heartedness of the plutocrats then ruling Europe, whose iron grip on the reins of power would brook no opposition in their quest to fulfill their personal ambitions, which includes filling their coffers with ill-gotten gains. This viewpoint, applied particularly to the world with which they were familiar—that of the Western Europe of the second half of the nineteenth century—is equally applicable to any nation which allows unfettered capitalism and its champions to dominate the social sphere and manipulate it for their benefit. American songwriter and musician Prince, in his poignant song "Golden Parachute," makes a similar argument against the methods of the privileged few, charging that not only do they employ unscrupulous business practices to preserve their elevated state, but that in addition they are able to dictate the accepted cultural narrative to the masses by their behind-the-scenes control of the media. Both works, *The German Ideology* and "Golden Parachute," composed over a hundred years apart, reach the same Marxist conclusion: unrestrained capitalism does not result in individual liberty as its defenders assert, but rather it leads to a repression of the majority by a group of corporate elitists whose primary means of enforcing meek acceptance on the part of the populace is by suppressing dissent. The three common themes in *The German Ideology* and "Golden Parachute" are as follows. One, the capitalistic system, inherently reactionary, seeks to guarantee the continuance in authority of the presently affluent and serves to perpetuate a quasi-aristocracy, whereby the condition becomes generational, with the scions of privilege occupying the catbird seat through no individual merit of their own. Two, an attempt is made to "buy off" artists and other independent operators to prevent them from revealing the truth of this scheme. And, three, the wealthy, the owners of the various media outlets, determine the cultural narrative by engaging in a propaganda campaign favorable to their interests, stifling contrarian points of view. If this plan were widely known and understood, the social benefits would be enormous, as the rich would be forced to pay their fair share of taxes, which they do not currently do, and this would lift millions from poverty; also, the industrialists that pollute the environment with impunity would be restrained from doing so, and this would lessen the spread of disease, improving public health as a whole; in addition, scientific advances beneficial to the preservation of human life would be placed in the public domain instead of becoming the exclusive property of the fortunate few.

First, the capitalist system is not conducive to entrepreneurship and rags-to-riches stories as its supporters would have the public gullibly believe. Indeed, entirely the opposite is true. The

very foundations of it can be traced to the medieval institution of feudalism, an antiquated social structure which produced developmental stagnation in the countries where it was established. Capitalism is the direct heir to feudalism, with the same negative consequences: the upper class, the idle rich, whiling away their time in trivial pursuits while the poor labor in squalor to obtain the basic means of subsistence. The primary means of the transference of wealth in both is inheritance: in the former, a rigid caste system coupled with the law of primogeniture to ensure the eldest male heir would assume his deceased father's position; in the latter, tax write-offs, low capital gains rates, compound interest, and the absence of an estate tax serve the same function. As Marx and Engels shrewdly note, this is all done to "facilitate the arrangement of historical materials" (Marx and Engels 9). And, what it mainly facilitates is the same people remaining at the top! Wealth is derived from goods and services, with the plutocrats and their descendants possessing the goods and their underlings providing the services for their masters' enrichment. The fact that the offspring frequently have not the business talent or the know-how of the family patriarch, but merely reap the undeserved abundance redounding from being born into a veritable dynasty is not taken into account. Prince observes this perceptively, describing them as “those who in truth created nothing.” Prince has hit the nail on the head here! The commonly-held, conservative view that those at the very bottom of the economic ladder are ungrateful sponges living off the productive toil of the diligent creators of prosperity is thus seen to be a form of deliberate inversion. The inheritors of unearned wealth are the real parasites! If the people of this country and other capitalist nations realized this, then by popular uprising they would compel those at the top to pay their fair share of taxes, and estate taxes would deduct a reasonable amount from the bequests disseminated to their children. This influx of government revenue could be used to raise millions from poverty by investing in public education and to fund medical research, thereby reducing the incidence of terminal disease and increasing average life expectancy for more people.

Second, the upper classes, to keep the true facts of how they stay in power under wraps and far from prying eyes, actively seek to compromise artists’ integrity by, in effect, paying them to be silent, i.e. “buying them off”. Since artists of various stripes are independent agents, free to express themselves as they see fit and, thus beyond the oversight to which employees of the oligarchs are subject, they present a danger to the powerful when they attain a certain degree of popularity and are able to influence the masses. It is at this point that an effort is made to get them to toe the party line, to support the corporate view of things. They are enticed with book contracts, recording contracts, offers to have their paintings showcased in major exhibitions—all with one end in mind: to get them to speak well of and support the established order. Prince describes this tacit admonition when he sings “just keep your mouth shut, and never tell of the plan.” But this extends beyond the arts, into the realm of sports. How many famous athletes have there been who, after being signed to lucrative endorsement deals, have had their deals rescinded when they dared to make a statement displeasing to the heads of the companies to which they were contractually bound? This seems on the surface an abridgement of First Amendment rights. Yet it is upheld in this society as if it were holy writ. Marx and Engels referred to this as “juridical illusion” (32), by which this long-standing custom is accepted as if it were graved in stone and universal law. This conscious effort to narrowly channel the public pronouncements of public figures may thus be seen to be a form of bribery, pure subornation, with the rescinding of promised monies looming over the heads of recipients as threatened punishment. Yet, it persists nonetheless. If the American people were aware of this campaign of

prevarication being waged by the major corporations, they would demand for fair contracts that do not punish artists/entertainers for engaging in public discourse. By doing this, more artists/entertainers would feel free to use their talents to address even more societal ills, such as the imposition of more severe regulations against the industrial giants polluting the atmosphere with their incessantly grinding factories, spewing toxic chemicals into the air. This pro-environmental approach, removing toxins from the urban sky, would be a cost-saving measure, as federal monies currently allocated to providing care for those made ill by inhaling poisonous air could be redirected toward treating those with organic and curable conditions. This public health policy would raise the average life expectancy in cities like Los Angeles, where the problem of air pollution is especially acute.

Third, there is the matter of the manner in which the media is owned and operated by the privileged few at the top of the social order. Marx and Engels rightly acknowledge that "History is always under the sway of ideas" (32). But these ideas, which are the bedrock of traditional belief and which form the basis of the cultural narrative, do not spring spontaneously from the private musings of the thoughtful citizen, but rather are intentionally shaped by elitists with an agenda to pursue. The media are the tools by which this indoctrination is affected. Who owns the television networks, the radio stations, the big-city newspapers? Is it the waitress who works in the corner diner, the sales clerk who works at the department store register, the foreman in charge of the road crew? No, they have not the resources for so massive and costly an undertaking. It is instead the well-heeled magnates of finance, kingpins of interlocking directorates and robber barons of Wall Street, whose worldview is put forward and endorsed by print and electronic media alike. Prince ruefully observes that the ambitions of the powerful reach even beyond this, as they endeavor to gain possession of artistic creations of artists themselves. He, as an artist singularly conscious of the consequences of this overt commercialization, genuinely fears that they will not rest until they "own every piece of intellectual property." By purchasing objects d'art like so many commodities, not only do they cheapen the elevated world of esthetics, but they seek to make artists beholden to them, body and soul. Prince resolutely fought against this subjugation in his long-running legal battle with the powers that be in the music industry, going so far as to write "slave" to bring attention to the manner in which record companies exploit artists. If the citizens of the capitalist nations of the world appreciated the magnitude of this nefarious plot, they would call for increased protections for artists' copyrighted work and for limits to be placed on the rampant consumerism of the modern world, where everything is for sale. This could be extended to technological advances as well. For example, the Human Genome Project has succeeded in mapping the blueprint of genetic structure and development. This technology promises cures for many currently untreatable medical conditions. The major biotech companies have evinced great interest in this discovery, desiring to buy exclusive rights to it and patent it for themselves. Making these advances freely available to all, rich and poor alike, would improve public health as a whole and make possible radical life extension.

In sum, then, capitalism creates a quasi-aristocracy in which acquired wealth is disseminated from generation to generation, frequently remaining in the hands of the undeserving. Additionally, a concerted effort is made by the business titans to silence artists through payment to prevent them from exposing and criticizing this system. And, these same elites control the media lock, stock, and barrel and use it to indoctrinate the populace. Karl Marx,

Friedrich Engels, and Prince, though men of different eras and different races, separated geographically by thousands of miles, reached the same conclusions concerning the way in which the capitalist system is sustained by the wielders of power. Marx and Engels in their book of political philosophy *German Ideology* and Prince in his song "Golden Parachute" are in consonance and agreement that hereditary wealth perpetuates social inequality, passing the mantle of overlordship and dominance from one generation to the next, irrespective of justice or merit. This way of conducting affairs is blithely accepted by the common people due to the fact that they have been indoctrinated to regard this system as desirable, feasible, and sound. This mindset has been instilled by a deliberate campaign of media bombardment perpetrated by the primary advocates of the present order, namely, the business leaders themselves, who have orchestrated this propaganda war for their own aggrandizement and retention of power. Moreover, they have sought to control the art world itself by making artists financially bound to and dependent upon them for their very livelihood, thus nipping in the bud any potential dissent from this segment of the public sphere. If the citizenry of all capitalist nations were awakened to this demonstrable fact, then significant improvements could be made in addressing social ills. These include raising taxes and eliminating loopholes that benefit the wealthy and using that money to raise millions from poverty; imposing new regulations on industrial concerns to prevent them from polluting the atmosphere, thereby improving public health and increasing average life expectancy; and making scientific advances such as the Human Genome Project freely available to all to eliminate diseases caused by genetic predispositions and to enable radical life extension.

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"Don't need no cymbals, no saxophone, all I need is a style of my own."
Prince, "Purple Music"

Dance Electric: On Synths, Soul, and the Sound of Prince

(This is an expanded version of the article published in *Mass Appeal*)

by Michael A. Gonzales

On the afternoon of April 21, 2016, after it was announced that Prince was found dead in an elevator at his Paisley Park studios, I reflected on my more than three decades as a fan of the man whose musical prowess, brilliance, and sheer productivity made him one of the defining musical artists of the 20th century and beyond. Even in his final days, as he performed the jazz lounge inspired Piano and a Microphone concerts, Prince was still experimenting with musical arrangements, tweaking his ever changing sound before the sky turned all purple and there were people running everywhere. A sonic chameleon till the end, the massive amounts of songs Prince composed in his lifetime has long been recognized as superb, but the aural avalanche of music, both known and unreleased material that surfaced after his death, was mindboggling, exciting, and a tad overwhelming. One song I'd never heard was "Purple Music," a track where Prince discusses the high he got in the studio creating music. "Don't need no cymbals, no saxophone, just need to find me a style of my own," he sang. "Ain't got no theory, ain't got no rules, I just let the purple music tell my body what to do." The never released track serves as an early self-portrait of a musical genius at work.

Early in his career when his label Warner Brothers Records was still selling him to the public as "the next Stevie Wonder," they didn't realize that Prince was a genius who had no intention of being compared to anyone. When Prince Rogers Nelson signed with Warner Brothers Records in 1977, the label discussed utilizing Earth, Wind & Fire leader Maurice White to produce his debut project. A "studio rat" that, at nineteen, was already savvy in the lab, Prince baulked, but he still had to convince the label of his talents. So, Warner sent him to Amigo Studios in North Hollywood to work. Since they owned the joint, it gave the suits the opportunity to spy on Prince, making them realize that, while "the kid" was young, he was already developing innovative concepts. The label decided to let Prince flesh out his ideas which would take a few years transform from safe R&B pop to a dance electric signature sound that would define the 1980s.

"Prince had total creative control over his art," writer Bill Adler who interviewed Prince in 1981 for *Rolling Stone*, says. "Everything that was great about '70s music from the funk to Joni Mitchell to punk was in him. When Prince emerged from Minneapolis, musically, he was already fully formed" (Adler 55). "A lotta records today are producers' records," Prince told Andy Schwartz of *New York Rocker* in 1981. "To me it doesn't mean anything, because I don't believe in any act, really, which had to rely on a producer. What happens if the cat dies? There you go, there goes your sound – you obviously didn't have one. The producer bakes the whole cake" (Schwartz). Coming of age in the early seventies, Prince was as influenced by rock radio in his hometown of Minneapolis as he was by the 45s he bought at Dee's Record Center every week. Eventually, he combined everything from be-bop to classical, funk to punk, gospel to garage, acoustic instruments, and synthesized technology to make his music. Back then, electronic instruments were becoming more prominent in both genres with prog pioneers Pink

Floyd, Emerson, Lake & Palmer and Yes rising in popularity while soul artists Sly Stone, the Ohio Players, and Stevie Wonder were also plugging-in incorporating electronic sounds into their music.

When he was fifteen, Prince ran away from home and lived with Andre Cymone's family from 1974 until signing his solo record deal in 1977. "Prince was into everything," long-time friend and former bassist Cymone, whose recent project *1969* was released last year, says. "He was always more of a 'head' than I was, meaning if Prince was into a certain artist, he wanted to hear everything that they did and study it" Cymone told me in 2017 when I interviewed him for *Soulhead.com*. As teenagers, Prince and Cymone were like brothers, and both of them cherished music. Taking the role of bass player, Cymone stood beside his friend jamming in the basement and was privy to Prince's early years as a developing musician. One of the artists Prince studied was Stevie Wonder, a former child prodigy turned grown pop genius. In 1972, Wonder began delving into the new technology when he collaborated with synthesizer wizards Robert Margouleff and Malcolm Cecil. The duo made electronic music using their custom build TONTO (The Original New Timbral Orchestra), which Wonder discovered after hearing their album *Zero Time* created under the name Tonto's Expanding Head; he used them for the first time on *Music of My Mind*.

In addition, Wonder was also digging the Moog music on the 1968 Grammy winning *Switched-On Bach*, the Walter (Wendy) Carlos album that ushered synthesizers into the mainstream. "A lot of people don't consider the Moog an instrument," Wonder told U.K. pop paper *Sounds* in 1972. "In a sense, and they feel it's gonna take a lot of work away from musicians and all that. But I feel it is an instrument and is a way to directly express what comes from your mind. It gives you so much of a sound in the broader sense. What you're actually doing with an oscillator is taking a sound and shaping it into whatever form you want. Maybe a year and a half ago I couldn't have done these kinds of tracks" (Valentine). Affirming Wonder's notions is writer Zeth Lundy, author of *Songs in the Key of Life (33 1/3* who told me in 2017, "I think Stevie 'humanized' synths in that he made them sound as alive and organic as traditional instruments." Lundy adds, "If you fall into the faction of discerning music snobs who turn their noses up at synths and 'soulless' technology, it becomes harder to disavow that kind of thing with someone like Stevie, because the sound of the synth becomes so undeniable. I think that is a large part of his genius, besides being a great writer, vocalist, and multidisciplinary musician, is that he made synths sound different."

"Stevie was the blueprint for Prince," Lundy says. "The musician who writes and plays it all, dedicates himself to the studio and the craft in this almost monastic fashion. I see Prince as the second coming of Stevie, the next logical step of that archetype's storyline. However, Prince streamlined it, made the music less cluttered and simpler, like a reduction on a stovetop." Margouleff and Cecil also worked with the 1973 Isley Brothers album *3+3*. "Malcolm built that (TONTO) synthesizer," Isley keyboardist Chris Jasper explained to me in 2015; he played an ARP synthesizer on *3+3*. "It wasn't as cumbersome as earlier models, but it was still pretty big. He got some great sounds out of it. Synthesizers looked very different back then. There were a lot of patch cords and it was very complicated. Originally Moogs were used to create sounds and different approaches to atonal music." Seventies pop culture was also space-age obsessed, with *Star Trek* and *The Jetsons* reminding us that the future was near. "Prince and I were into totally

into science fiction television back then, and our musical taste was all over the place," Cymone says. "We shared a bedroom, and every night, before going to bed, we'd play a different album; it could be David Bowie, Funkadelic, or the Natural Four. We were also playing Devo, The Cars, Blondie, Roxy Music, and Gary Numan, but Kraftwerk was the first electronic music that made us take notice." Kraftwerk was making a great impression on the entire music scene and especially within the African-American community. "What I try to do on the synthesizers," Ralf Hütter—lead singer, keyboardist, and founding member of Kraftwerk—told the *New York Times* in 2009, "is sing with my fingers. This rhythm, industrial rhythm, that's what inspires me. It's in the nature of the machines. Machines are funky" (Rubin). Prince began using electronic instruments when he was a guitar playing member of the local group Grand Central whose band members included Cymone (Bass), Morris Day (drums), and Linda Anderson (keyboards); Linda was Cymone's sister.

When Prince was sixteen, he bought his first keyboard/synthesizer, an Oberheim 4-voice, from a local shop called Roger Dodger Music. "That was his first foray into synths," Cymone says. Although many Black bands of the era featured horn sections, Grand Central opted for Linda's keyboard playing (under Prince's guidance) to fill-in the sound. According to Alex Hahn's *The Rise of Prince: 1958-1988*, he got the idea after watching Sly & the Family Stone trumpeter Cynthia Robinson doing her thing at a live gig. Substituting horns with synthesizers became essential to the style he developed in his home studio that would later become known as the Minneapolis Sound. In *Prince: The Making of a Pop Music Phenomenon* authors Stan Hawkins and Sarah Niblock described the Minneapolis Sound as, "…characterized by highly processed drum (Linn LM-1) tracks with less bass than in traditional funk. Dominated by keyboards and rhythm guitar parts, with brash synthesizers substituting for the horn section, the Minneapolis sound comprised a rhythmic underlay that was less syncopated than funk and clearly influenced by new wave" (5).

In 2014, Bowie producer and ambient music innovator Brian Eno told *New Yorker* writer Sasha Frere-Jones, "Someone told me that he read an interview with Prince, where Prince said that the record which most influenced him was my *Another Green World*, which was incredibly flattering. It's my understanding that Prince had picked up on the idea that you could have records that were kind of sonic landscapes with vocals on them, and that's sort of what *Another Green World* was." While he might've overinflated the impact of his record, Prince was listening to Eno in addition to Joe Zawinul (Weather Report), Herbie Hancock, Bernie Worell (P-Funk), George Duke, Rodger Troutman (Zapp), and the recently deceased Junie Morrison. "In Black music, other than Stevie, I don't think there's anyone that used Moogs funkier, prolifically, and musically adventurous than Junie Morrison," says Burnt Sugar keyboardist Bruce Mack who told me that, "Junie was with the Ohio Players in their early days. That's him doing all the keyboard work and the crazy voice on the classic 'Funky Worm.' He also did tons of work with Funkadelic and Parliament; he co-wrote 'One Nation under a Groove.'"

In the November, 1975 issue of *Black Music*, journalist Davitt Sigerson wrote the feature "Get ARP and Get Down" as an attempt to explain the "proliferation of new and strange keyboard instruments" and electronics surging through soul music. "The basic idea is that they generate a sound (either smooth or rough) by means of a vibrating gismo known as an oscillator. They then take this sound and do things to it: alter the volume, tone, musical value, the time it

takes to build, peak and decay, and the attack—whether it's a staccato burst, or a siren-like continuum, as in the Ohio Players' 'Funky Worm.' The large Moog is probably the most versatile of synthesizers, but the more straightforward ARP (and also the Minimoog) finds favor with the instinctive musicians more common in soul music." Similarly, Morrison told *Red Bull Music Academy Daily* journalist Jeff "Chairman" Mao in 2015, "I would travel all over the world looking for tech to use on our tracks. As time would have it, I found an Arp Soloist in a shop somewhere in NYC. Immediately, it sung to me and I heard an Arabian style riff that had "worm" written all over it. I bought this synth and went into the studio with it." Still, when cultural critics discuss pioneers of electronic music, rarely are Black music innovators acknowledged for their contributions. "I do think generally that when people talk of the history of electronic pop music they talk about Kraftwerk and Moroder, deservedly, but hardly anyone mentions Stevie wonder's pioneering work, or Bernie Worrell," explains *Totally Wired: Postpunk Interviews and Overviews* author Simon Reynolds in a personal interview. He continues, "Equally, they don't mention the fusion guys like Herbie Hancock or Joe Zawinul. That might be because their use of synths was so musical, groovy, jazzy, virtuosic verging on florid, that it wasn't as starkly futuristic as the Germans work." While Reynolds views the exclusion as "rockist," it still communicates or signifies as racist when one considers the depth and breadth of Black folks' relationship with electronic instruments. In addition, if the synths sound of Wonder, Worrell, and Morrison wasn't "as starkly futuristic," we must be aware of who is defining the future and to what outcome. This is the same kind of logic that often erases Africa from contributions to early civilization in favor of Greek chronicles, myths and bloodlines. However, as with any history, it takes more than denial to erase the truth. From a young age, Prince was well aware of the blackadelic futures in the tunes of his heroes and was determined to build on that electric legacy towards a better tomorrow.

Prince left Grand Central in 1976 and, along with Sound 80 studio owner/lyricist Chris Moon and first manager Owen Husney, began working on demos. Prince went back to Roger Dodger Music and, according to a couple of interviews with the music store owner Roger Dumas, bought a Yamaha DX-7, E-mu sampler, and an ARP Omni, which he later used on *1999*. Dumas also taught Prince to program the machines (Kirby and "Minnesotan to Meet"). A year later, he signed with Warner Brothers. Although he used bass synths, Polymoogs, ARPs, Minimoogs, and Oberheim 4-voice on his 1978 debut *For You* and self-titled follow-up a year later, both albums were innocent romps compared to the punkish wild child *Dirty Mind* in 1980, the groundbreaking third album that surprised the world. Yet, like Robert Johnson standing at the crossroads shaking hands with the devil, Prince had changed dramatically. "A lot of Prince's flip had to do with a U.K. review that said that he was tame compared to British acts," Cymone explains to me years later. "Prince took that very seriously and said, 'Maybe we need to step things up a little bit.' That year, we were also touring, and in New York we visited CBGB's, The Ritz and the Bottom Line, just checking out different punk and new wave bands. It started making us understand what the underground was all about." Naturally, Prince wasn't going to be throwing his pretty self into any mosh pits, but he plugged into a grittier aesthetic. Having previously sold his image as the coy boy, in 1980 he returned hard both sartorially and sonically with *Dirty Mind*. The punk influence could be seen in the stark album cover and heard in the stripped down demo-quality of the music. From the opening title tracking and the closing "Partyup," most of the songs were as frantic as anything by the Ramones or the Clash.

Living Colour guitarist Vernon Reid, who played CBGBs often in the eighties and performed twice with Prince a decade later, says in a personal 2017 interview that "The key to Prince's evolution was his being a multi-instrumentalist who played well. He was also coming of age during a revolutionary time in music, so he could go play a P-Funk vibe or a Motown type thing and the turn around and play something that reminded you of Weather Report." With *Dirty Mind*, the sonic auteur proved that he was a brilliant musician and a brave writer who was also great at world building; like "new wave" science fiction writer J.G. Ballard, who had a knack for taking everyday locations and turning them into other worlds, Prince created the fantastic Afro-futuristic hedonistic universe that he called "Uptown," where anything (especially musically) was possible. According to *Genius.com* and *Prince Vault.com*, the real Uptown "…refers to the popular commercial district in southwestern Minneapolis, Minnesota, centered at the Uptown Theater (the former Lagoon) at the intersection of Hennepin Avenue and Lagoon Avenue" ("Uptown"). Prince, however, turned "uptown" into his own utopian world where, "…we don't let society, tell us how it's supposed to be/our clothes, our hair, we don't care/it's all about being there/everybody's going Uptown/that's where I want to be/Uptown, set your mind free." "Uptown" was what Prince called his studio, but the song also represented a sonic declaration of independence set into motion the year Ronald Reagan was elected. However, in Prince's mind "uptown" also represented an imagined sanctuary advocating freaky and free behavior as well as musical, religious and political liberation. "Uptown is a state of mind," he told a reporter. "It has to do with how free you are" (Boskamp). Listening to *Dirty Mind* with headphones, in my imagination "Uptown" became a strange city a blissful neon-lit landscape where sex and religion wasn't shameful and the futuristic music was plentiful. For Prince, both lyrically and musically, it was all about freedom, and there were no limitations or restrictions in terms of subject or soundscapes.

And, of course, this new technological independence enabled him to manifest his musical and lyrical ideas in a variety of ways, expanding his image and imagery as well as the notion of what it meant to be black and what a black person could accomplish. During this period Prince became more confident in his skills and began composing and producing side-projects: The Time, Vanity (Apollonia) 6, Shelia E and Jill Jones, shaping and refining his emerging electro funk/dance style on their early projects under the pseudonym Jamie Starr. This would greatly influence a new generation of producers, such as Dallas Austin when he was producing '90s sensations TLC as well as other noted acts, including Klymaxx's Joyce Irby, Troop, Another Bad Creation, Boyz II Men, Joi, After 7, Madonna, and Gwen Stefani. In an article for *Billboard* and later for *Mass Appeal.com*, Austin told me that "The sound of Prince's records took you to a different atmosphere, and that's what I wanted for TLC." Austin cited the Apollonia 6 song "Blue Limousine" as the track that lit his fire when planning his production on the group's sophomore album *CrazySexyCool*. "I wanted T-Boz to sound like Prince used to sound, but put on her own thing. From the beginning, I made sure that TLC had a distinguished sound, but on *CrazySexyCool*, I wanted to bring out the Prince side" (Gonzales 21). However, just as Prince was getting deeper into punk, the music was literally fading as a new breed of young Brits transferred their angst into a new (post-punk, post-everything) called new wave.

With quick follow-ups *Controversy* (1981), using a LM-1 Linn drum for the first time on the track "Private Joy," and *1999* (1982), the latter being "the first record on which Prince started to explore more complex drum-machine patterns and keyboard textures," according to

biographer Ben Greenman in *Dig If You Will the Picture* (265). That trilogy of albums—*Dirty Mind*, *Controversy*, and *1999*—was a tour de force of imagination that was high tech, gritty, and atmospheric music that transcended everything. Embracing synthesizers fully, early Prince influencers included Soft Cell, Ultravox, Heaven 17, and Human League. "Prince utilized things in dance music, rock, jazz fusion, new wave," Reid said. In the studio putting the final touches on *Shade*, a Living Colour album released in 2017, he chuckled. "As far as influences, he'd play things out and see where they took him. He was never afraid of what people would say. The dare to be different ethos was very much alive in his work." Prince's love for both sci-fi and electronic music synergized beautifully on *Controversy*'s staggering "Annie Christian," which sounds like a cyberfunk homage to Numan's single "Cars." Yet, while *Controversy* gave us a taste of his new wave funk, it wasn't until the following year with the stunning *1999* that Prince went all the way.

Composing a symphony that was equally soulful and synthetic, he constructed a synthesizer soundtrack not unlike the scores Tangerine Dream (*Sorcerer*) and Vangelis (*Chariots of Fire*) were making for actual films. "The synthesizer had two direct impacts, one on economics and the other on vision," writes C. Liegh McInnis in *The Lyrics of Prince Rogers Nelson*. McInnis continues:

> The affordable home synthesizer of the 1980s allowed more individuals the freedom to make music. Because it was specifically designed to mimic a wide variety of instruments, it allows one person to articulate his vision more freely. As Kashif asserts [to McInnis], "The synthesizer is one device that allows you to make a myriad of sounds and orchestral textures that are a unique and whole new palate of sounds." This allows an individual who may not be skilled in a variety of instruments or may not have the money to pay a lot of musicians to achieve the vision in his head without the economic restrictions or limitations of the past. It must be noted that while Prince is using the synthesizer, he is also playing the guitar, the bass and the drums on almost every single and on every album. Through the vision of Stevie Wonder and Sun Ra, Prince uses the synthesizer to play with and accompany himself like very few have been able to do. In fact, what Prince does is aid in making the synthesizer an instrument in its own right; rather than just mimicking sounds with it, Prince used to synthesizer to create other, unique sounds (79).

During the early '80s, it sounded as if all of his music was inspired by electricity, sex, and politics that morphed from ditties to dance floor anthems; the mojo of those albums spread to other emerging genres of American dance music, including Chicago House and Detroit Techno. "At the Paradise Garage, whenever dj Larry Levan played 'Controversy' or '1999' the place would go crazy," recalls Domingo Cante, producer of the outdoor dance festival documentary *Hands to the Sky*. "As soon as that robotic voice at the beginning on '1999' played through that Richard Long sound system, people would just lose it."

On *1999* the robotic voice opening of the title track ushers listeners towards a sonic rabbit hole as Prince drags them through a wonderland of circuitry and sonic textures that included the celebratory futurism of "1999" and "D.M.S.R.," the auto-eroticism of "Little Red Corvette" and "Lady Cab Driver," and the cybersexy "Let's Pretend We're Married" and "International Lover." *Musician* magazine critic Laura Fissinger wrote, "His mastery of sonic texture and detailing has

exploded. Here he takes a bevy of synthesizers, those pets of the poker-face dada set, and wrests intimate eloquence from them as if they were human voices. Digital drums and infinite other percussion devices are flesh-and-blooded, too." Following the explosion of *1999*, there was a sizable sonic shift across the country. The Minneapolis sound spawned hundreds of acts who had nothing to do with the city, most notably Ready for the World ("Oh Sheila"), Giorgio ("Tina Cherry"), and Chico DeBarge ("Talk to Me"). Former Prince associates Terry Lewis and Jimmy Jam (Janet Jackson), Andre Cymone (Jody Watley), Brownmark (Mazarati), and Jesse Johnson (Ta Mara and the Seen) also developed their own future funky rock productions based on that synth-heavy sound. However, always thinking about the future, Prince basically left the Minneapolis Sound behind after *Purple Rain*, because, as he told me during an interview in 1999, "the biters" were swiping his style.

Over a career that spanned thirty-eight years, Prince's often seductive, sometimes spooky, black noise has inspired countless left of center artists and producers, including Detroit Techo posses, Chicago House folks, Q-Tip, Massive Attack, Dallas Austin, Tricky, Joi, Erykah Badu, D'Angelo, Pharrell Williams, Beck, Janelle Monáe, Thundercat, Van Hunt, Anderson Paak, Bilal, and countless others. When I met Prince at Paisley Park in 1999, we discussed his many digital disciples, and he began goofing on production upstart Timabaland. Apparently the then new jack producer was whining in a magazine interview that others were stealing his sound. "Hey, if you're so bad. change your sound," Prince mocked. "That's what I've always done."

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PRINCE-iple L3SS0NS:
Analyzing the Potential Theoretical or Didactic Messages in 'Prince' as Conceptualization

by helen j. crump

Indescribable. Uncategorizable. Undefinable.[1] Intersectional. Such concepts assist in explicating the artist and legacy known as Prince. In one regard, I might suggest that Prince (as conceptual entity, not just an individual) occupies a particular kind of in-between and "outside of" space that defies or resists definition; however, his existence and impact are much more than simply in-between and external to fixed spaces or identities. Rather, Prince both exists between and challenges the idea of identity and existence as fixed in any capacity. Even more, I contend that this means of viewing and reading "Prince" positions the body as text, as societal and cultural canvas upon which the artist himself paints / constructs his creations through music (instrumentation, lyrics, movement, costume, performance, and impact), as well as through and upon which the audience reads and engages with a dynamic sense and understanding of society, culture, and more. Consequently, Prince is positioned as ever evolving: continuously creating, collaborating, constructing, resisting, renewing, repositioning and transitioning, transcending barriers, limitations, categorizations, symbolizings, and significations ... because it's hard / difficult, near impossible, to grow, to see and discern, to envision the future and beyond if one pauses, halts, stops in any way and allows others to define who one is, to delineate one's characteristics and parameters. To be liberated, one must be free to define, or not, one's self, one's identity, expressions, tastes, interests, one's rebellions, movements ... and even one's stillness. And this is a "lesson" that can be extrapolated from a consideration and examination of the life, work, and/or legacy of the artist, humanitarian, icon known as Prince. In this essay, I contemplate how the life and lyrics of Prince (aka Prince Rogers Nelson) exemplify the intersection of multiple concepts of living and being and serve as a very real example of the complications and potentials of "living" and "being" in regards to identity, lyricism, and advocacy, all of which speak to the significance of flexibility, yet are positioned as in resistance to unnecessary and personal (moral / ethical) compromise. Using Juanita Karpf's examination of the art and activism of Amelia L. Tilghman's career as inspiration, I situate Prince's work as similarly "music as an agent of protest, defiance, and social reform" (604). As with Karpf's reading of Tilghman's integration of art and socio-political commentary and action, I contend that Prince's music, at least in part, "effect[s] a type of hybrid activist discourse situated at the crosscurrents of art music and […] cultural identity" (Karpf 615). Such is visible in a variety of his lyrics and the occasions that prompted his writing, a few of which I address below. Attention and/or adherence to PRINCE-iples derived from "Prince" could potentially yield a broader understanding and acceptance of difference and non-normative behaviors, identities, and analyses … or at least a tolerance for them. Moreover, a nuanced awareness and comprehension of the significances of racial, cultural, social, gender, and class differences, for example, as suggested in the overall "Prince" concept, can lead to more directed, extensive, and interconnected protests against systemic oppressions and injustices. For the reality is that most persons, nationally and globally speaking, operate within multiple locations of identity, many of which intersect. And only when our protests, our calls to equality and, even greater, to equity

[1] Note: The irony of saying this before actually attempting to do so, even if such doing is to indicate a diversity, flexibility, and/or multi-situational existence that challenges a singular definition and such, is not lost on me.

tend more fully and broadly to recognize such realities (such diverseness) will we begin to see a more consistent and impactful / influential shift in alleviating those oppressions – individual, collective, and systemic. This is possible especially if associated with adjustments in mindset, perceptions of others, and a revaluation of the "non-normative" as closer to a sense of what, in the twenty-first century, is and should be considered normative.

Now, for full disclosure, I must admit that I am not now, nor have I ever been, a Prince "fan." I've certainly never claimed the title for myself. At a young age, my sister introduced me to Prince. We slept with a *Purple Rain* poster and Prince album covers pinned to the walls over our beds, watching over us like angels. We went to bed with "Adore," "Diamonds & Pearls," "Insatiable," and other Prince bedtime stories on repeat, lullabies rocking us to sleep. Both willingly and unwillingly, I joined my sister in discussions of his music – lyrics and arrangements, and even the styles used with wording and instrumentation; his sex appeal (especially that unexpectedly deep voice and smile); his unabashed depictions and discussions of sexuality and sex; his calls to the world to do better, be better; his treatise on domestic violence; his influences on & music written for other artists; and so much more in the realm of things identifiable as or in association with Prince. Consequently, I like much of his music, videos, aspects of his movies, his style, his sense of humor, compassion, humbleness, and his multitalented-ness, and I greatly appreciate his moments of resistance to social conventions and expectations, to corporate and other ownership and classification, his philanthropy and activism. Generally speaking, I like(d) the man, the musician, and the humanitarian, but still I would not classify myself as a fan. Despite experiential reports from multiple people across the years, I never clamored to catch one of his concerts, to visit his home when he opened it to the public, to buy his music as soon as it came out or as close to that as possible. Although, I did unexpectedly have an opportunity to go to his club in Minneapolis in the 90s while visiting Minnesota as part of a summer research program. And if memory serves me well, I happened to be there on a night that he came through and performed a quick something for the crowd. Before that, I rewrote the lyrics of "Raspberry Beret" to be "Blueberry Blue Jeans" about a "guy" I saw in a "second-hand store" because the song was fun to sing and I needed a male-focus translation. I bought his *Black* album for my sister because she was and is such a fan, such an admirer of the legend, the icon … the reason for the posters, discussions, and lullabies of my childhood and youth.

Yet, with such evidence before me, and after careful and critical contemplation, I don't believe I qualify as a "fan." I am more one who stands in appreciation of the man, the mind, the heart, skills, talents, and the amazing self-awareness and refusal to be restricted in an effort to be himself (whoever that turned out to be for however long it turned out to be) and to live his best life. A multifaceted character and human being (referring to the persona / entertainer and the man, respectively), there is much to view, read, and analyze regarding the one known as Prince and his many accomplishments – and controversies. However, here, the focus is on a potential theoretical take-away or "lessons" from the life and legacy that Prince has bequeathed to fans, critics, scholars, and casual observers alike. Specifically, I posit an analysis of how the broad concept that is "Prince" offers a sense of being, identifying, and navigating (the world) that challenges the idea of a "fixed" identity or categorization. The span of his life, music, racial make-up, gender, and/or sexual expression, in addition to his sense of spiritual and sexual lyrical content and context, provide examples of the complicatedness and limitedness of "boxing in" people and the benefits of allowing for a flexibility of identification – whether in regards to the

personal, professional, spiritual, or cultural aspects of a person's life. For while categorization can be helpful in regards to academic or business-related affairs, for example, it can inhibit our understanding and fuller grasp of an artist, a work, and the potential impact of both artist and work on society and the people exposed to them. For instance, if viewers only perceive Prince as a "funk" artist, then they disregard the value and influence of "The Beautiful Ones," "Insatiable," "Adore," "We March," or "Future Soul Song." If cast as "rhythm and blues" artist, then how do listeners and critics position gems like "Starfish and Coffee," "The Ballad of Dorothy Parker," "Baltimore," or "The War"? Even more, if listeners pigeonhole Prince's artistry, then the messages (literal and metaphorical) throughout his music are obfuscated. It is essential to society's continued intellectual and cultural enrichment that it approaches the arts (reflections of our socio-cultural, racial, economic, political, and historical experiences) and other media with minds open to both traditional and nontraditional interpretations. We must be attentive and adhere to the potential meanings and lessons embedded in unconventional narratives and resources. In so doing, viewers / readers encounter and potentially comprehend the value of experiences expressed through perspectives and by people from multiple and varying walks of life. To omit or ignore such views is to assume that one understanding (generally conservative, white, patriarchally-directed) is the only or most important viewpoint – a narrative that must be disrupted. Such a limited view denies the real, lived experiences of people who are generally marginalized, oppressed, and erased from global, national, and local narratives, whose creativity and other intellectual accomplishments are neglected or dismissed (or alternatively coopted). The range of Prince's lyrics and experiences prompt and encourage this kind of out-of-the-box thinking and acceptance.

Thus, I focus on potential meanings behind Prince's lyrics. According to Robert Walser, writing for *Encyclopaedia Britannica* under the subject of "Prince," "Prince's lyrics often address sexuality and desire with frankness and imagination. Much of his work, in its lyrics and imagery, struggles with the constriction of social conventions and categories. As one of his biographers put it, 'The whole thrust of Prince's art can be understood in terms of a desire to escape the social identities thrust upon him by simple virtue of his being small, black, and male.'" Walser continues, noting that "Prince explored typographical oddities in his song titles and lyrics as another way of evading convention" ("Prince"). In analyzing the context of being, resistance, and self-definition reflected in the "Prince" concept, I argue that various "lessons" can be extrapolated from his musical legacy. Although, there are several others that can be garnered from Prince's works and other lyrics and experiences that can be used to support such claims, generally speaking, I consider three particular lessons: **Value of Ownership** – of self and name, of image / persona, of artistry (right to the master copies of one's work), and of one's creativity (how and what one creates); **Value of Conviction & Equality** (advocating against injustices and issuing calls to action); and **Value of Flexibility and Diverse Perspective** (resisting conventional expectations and singular categorizations).

Lesson 1 – Ownership and Personal Identification are invaluable: Prince released "My Name Is Prince" on the *Love Symbol* (1992) album at the beginning of his battle with Warner Brothers for the control of his name, literally, and of his master tracks from Warner Brothers. After realizing that Warner Brothers controlled the rights to his music, the rights to his image, and the rights to his name (Prince), he took to writing the word "Slave" across his face and adopted an unpronounceable love symbol – ⚘– as his new moniker. Consequently, he was

also known as "The Artist Formerly Known as Prince" (TAFKAP or The Artist for short). In the song mentioned above, Prince begins by stating, "My name is Prince and I am funky / My name is Prince the one and only" (Prince and Tony M.) As such, he seems to affirm the result of his legal contract battle with Warner Brothers: that the name "Prince" and the works associated with it belonged to the man known as Prince Rogers Nelson. This claiming of identity is significant in that he is musically and literally reclaiming and declaring who he is, which is a powerful concept and statement in the context of business and society when companies and organizations can and have ownership of an artist's style, creativity, production, and performance to the point that the artist is limited and/or no longer belongs to self. Too, it is a powerful statement in a society so consumed with people attempting to be or look like others, to form their identities based on trends to the point that they have little idea of who they are outside of what society, celebrities, corporations, or governments tell them that they are. To be free, we must resist being owned, must (re)claim ourselves – must take ownership of our own construction of identity and how that identity will be named and represented. This is one of the more valuable lessons highlighted in Prince's life and legacy, especially since it situates the man and his legacy to be able to provide additional lessons.

At the end of his struggles with Warner Brothers, in part the result of the Digital Millennium Copyright Act (Lifton), Prince released his *Emancipation* album (1996), another visible and lyrical testament to his accomplishment of self-reclamation. The album includes the tracks "Slave" and "Emancipation." "Slave" begins with and repeats a chorus that states, "Everybody keeps trying to break my heart / Everybody except for me / I just want a chance to play the part / The part of someone truly free" (Prince). As such, the singer-narrator recognizes that he is the primary (or only) one to have his best interests at heart, to want him to be truly liberated. He simply needs the opportunity to "play the part" of the free, to exercise personal choice and explore his creativity to its fullest. Limited freedom is not actually freedom. Although the idea of "playing" the part suggests that his freedom is not even really "freedom" or his own, the overall implication is that people need and should be given the chance to express themselves for themselves, not just bend and adhere to the dictates of others. While this is invaluable for the artist, regardless of medium, it holds true for anyone exploring one's potential or personal truth. If allowed to choose or create our own direction (path) and destination (goals), if allowed to perceive the expectations and prescriptions of the world and yet choose our own sense of self, of being, then we are more inclined to lean toward a happier, fuller existence, one constructed within and promoting our own truth. Significantly, this holds because creating our own goals and ideas for accomplishment subsequently means creating our own sense or expectations of happiness, thus not relying on someone else's dictates. Furthermore, it minimizes the amount and kind of competition we allow in our lives, which can have a positive impact on our self-esteem and overall psychological health. Imagine how liberating it would be to have real agency over our lives and our identity. Not only would we be, to an extent, unencumbered psychologically, but also, we would be more open to accepting others' definitions of themselves.

Similarly and more aggressively, Prince addresses this question of freedom / agency in the song "Emancipation." The chorus reflects a yearning for freedom, liberation from forces that have kept and keep the artist restrained. So, the singer-songwriter narrates that he wants, "Emancipation - free to do what I want to / Emancipation - see you in the purple rain / … / Emancipation - break the chain, break the chain" (Prince). In one of the verses, he reveals an

experience of being bowed and oppressed, his value diminished: "[W]hen I was on my knees / My back was broken and my spirit ill at ease / And now it seems just like the autumn leaves / Your money's turned from green to brown and now you best believe" ("Emancipation"). Is it that he was on his knees because his "back was broken," spirit on edge, or was his back broken while he was on his knees and his spirit discombobulated? Either way, it seems the narrator experienced physical and psychological efforts to oppress him, to enslave him. However, the shift of the leaves from green to brown proposes that the power of that controlling entity has failed / faded. Now, the narrator is no longer hindered by the financial or capitalist control of the entertainment industry, and the freedom he seeks is forthcoming. As the song concludes, the singer claims, "Free – don't think I ain't!" (Prince). Therefore, the question of naming and claiming, of ownership, has officially and unquestionably been resolved. And in line with Prince's victory against Warner Brothers, he thus claims "Emancipation." Taking this process as a cue, members of typically marginalized or othered groups can similarly pursue emancipation and proclaim that they are "Free – don't think [we] ain't!" First, we must begin by recognizing and denouncing the "chains" that have bound us, that limit our movements and agency over our lives – the systematic oppressions that produce and feed into racism, sexism, classism, homophobia, xenophobia, and so on. Then, we must embrace our own method of self-determination and our own truths, as mentioned previously. As such, we can determine paths through which or that enable us to circumvent the people and the systems that seek to pigeonhole, imprison, and/or otherwise limit our freedoms and (re)claim our emancipation.

Lesson 2 – A "Single Story" or Perspective is a limiting and potentially dangerous thing: Prince released "Starfish and Coffee" in 1987 on his *Sign O' the Times* album. The song, influenced by the true experiences of Susannah Melvoin, then band member and girlfriend of Prince, about a former classmate of hers, 12-year old Cynthia Rose (Melvoin). Of the several valuable elements of this song, a few key ones coincide with the idea of being and flexibility. One is associated with the valuing of story and experience, even if that story and experience are very different from one's own or one's idea of what is typical. Prince demonstrates this in seeing the value of Melvoin's recollections and in the viewpoint of Cynthia Rose, who, according to Melvoin, had a different way of viewing and enjoying the world, as if she "was dropped off from another world filled with extraordinary images. Images only Cynthia new the' meanings behind" (sic) (Melvoin). Even more, the song seems to suggest that people limit themselves by conforming to conventional thinking, traditional ways of thinking about things and viewing the world. As such, hearing of a breakfast of "Starfish and coffee / Maple syrup and jam / Butterscotch clouds, a tangerine / And a side order of ham" (Prince and Melvoin) makes some question the reality or sanity of the person recounting or having had such a meal. However, as Prince concludes in the chorus: "If you set your mind free, baby / Maybe you'd understand" ("Starfish and Coffee"). His lyrics direct listeners to be open to new ideas, new interpretations, and even new experiences to gain understanding, a new or broader perspective. Chimamanda Adichie, in her TEDTalk "The Danger of the Single Story," addresses this concept as well. Through examples based on others' perceptions of her and Africa broadly, as well as her own ideas of others, Adichie notes the limitations of presuming the accuracy of generalizations and the dangers of making assumptions about groups of people and places. Ultimately, author and artist alike argue for the value of an open point of view. And in "New World" from the *Emancipation* album, a song about a future society, a "brave new world" of increased tracking and surveillance from some controlling entity, as well as bio-technological advancements that

divorce the living from actually living, Prince raises concerns about how such modifications will change humanity, asking, "Who or what … will you and I be?" (Prince). Yet, despite the potential misgivings, he gives listeners a cue as to how to deal with the blurring of lines or identities of this new world when the boundaries we've come to expect are no longer as definable or visible as before. Simply, he advises, "When the lines blur every boy and girl / How we gonna make it in this brave new world? / Love for one another - New world." And in a world and a time when differences lead to violence, isolation, division and racist, sexist, transphobic, and anti-immigrant behaviors, a return to a seemingly simple act of loving one another just might be a first step toward change, toward understanding the world from a different, more diverse perspective.

Lesson 3 – Value of Conviction & Equality: In addition to fighting for his own rights in regards to name, music, and creativity in the legal battle with Warner Brothers, Prince has long been a supporter of social and political issues affecting the black community and communities of color, writing and performing songs that advocate equality, anti-discrimination, anti-government control, and free speech and thinking. He demonstrates this in such songs as "We March" (1995), "The War" (1998) (performed with The New Power Generation or NPG), "Future Soul Song" (2010), and "Baltimore" (2015). For instance, in "We March," Prince calls for change through action, stating, "Now's the time 2 find a rhyme (Yeah) / That's got a reason and frees the mind (Yeah) / From angry thoughts, the racist kind (Yeah) / If we all wanna a change then come on get in line / Next time we march (Whoa) / We're kickin' down the door / Next time we march (Whoa) / All is what we're marchin' 4" (Prince and Gaye). In the role of advocate, Prince and Gaye, the lyricists, send a call for a response to racist thoughts, verbalizations, and actions, and the call is not for forgiveness or peaceful demonstrations. As the lyrics indicate, this is about an assertive resistance in which the black community and its supporters will kick down doors, barriers that have yielded little in response to the violence hurled against black people with little to no repercussions.

Prince echoes this call to action in "The War" with lyrics proclaiming, "If U do not wish 2 be challenged, leave now / The evolution will be colorized" (The New Power Generation / NPG). In both songs, the artist contends that the time for patience or civil response is over, and moving forward, actions of resistance must be visible, decisive for change to occur. In the 26-minute edited song "The War," Prince also references environmental issues – "We are running out of the essentials of life: / Oxygen, water, food, fertile earth" – and racist acts, like the dragging murder of James Byrd, Jr. in Jasper, Texas, in June 1998, juxtaposed a narrative of patriotism – "Pledge allegiance 2 your flag / U tie me 2 a truck, 'n' then U drag" (NPG). Class and race privileges have left marginalized people unprotected in a country that proclaims significant wealth and asks for loyalty; yet those outside of the privileges – usually the poor and people of color – are vulnerable to classism and racism. Moreover, Prince suggests that race and class discrimination aren't just individual acts but systemic ones. Thus, he uses much of "The War" to address efforts by the government and other persons of substantial economic and social capital to control lives and narratives. Referring to this song, David Liston writes that Prince's lyrics "are among his angriest, accusing the government of repeatedly lying, putting microchips in peoples' necks and infecting the African American community with the HIV virus" ("Prince Goes to Great Lengths on 'The War'"). Prince (in this predominantly spoken piece) highlights the need to make visible the impact of such systematic oppressions by using accurate

representations or examples in the information-sharing process: "One, two, the evolution will be colorized / … / U give me AIDS, your history / When it comes 2 mine, another name / Many die and this is true / Red, black, yellow, even Jew / Claimin' God was backin' U / All across, what a fool" (NPG). In this way, Prince acknowledges that the oppression of / discrimination against people of color through medical, environmental, religious, and political means has a historical precedent that must be acknowledged and resisted.

Writing / singing just over a decade later, seeming to share a message of hope, Prince released "Future Soul Song," another lesson in having conviction and living free of oppression. He notes that it is "the absence of fear and control," resounding "Louder than the dogmatic persecution," that will be "the future soul song," the sound of liberation for the people. Then, with the increase in the number and visibility of deaths of blacks, especially black males, at the hands of the police, the call for equality, conviction, voice, and action was renewed in 2015 when Prince released the protest song "Baltimore." In it he asks, "Does anybody hear us pray / For Michael Brown or Freddie Gray? / Peace is more than the absence of war / … / Are we gonna see another bloody day? / We're tired of the crying and people dying / Let's take all the guns away / … / If there ain't no justice, then there ain't no peace / … / Baltimore" (Prince "Baltimore"). Even more than questioning if the petition of the people has fallen on unhearing / non-listening ears, and seeming to draw on the Civil Rights movement (significantly youth and young adults) and recent movements like Black Lives Matter, Occupy Wall Street, and the Parkland Teens and the March for Our Lives, Prince urges persistence in the move for change, a change which he says, "gonna take the young people to fix it this time. We need new ideas. We need new life. Most of all, we need new peace. The kind of peace I'm talkin' about is P-I-E-C-E" (Liston). The "P-I-E-C-E" to which Prince refers is reflective of his admiration for and being influenced by James Brown and the manner in which Brown was able, even if only shortly, to embody the sensibilities of the Black Power / Black Arts Movement with several of his songs, specifically "Funky President," in which Brown asserts, "Let's get together get some land/ Raise our food like the man," and "I Don't Want Nobody to Give Me Nothing," in which Brown asserts, "We got talents we can use / On our side of town / Let's get our heads together / And get it up from the ground." Thus, the lesson of flexibility in identity is parallel with the room for growth and evolution in which Prince publically becomes atypical of the "normal/natural narrative arc of many African Americans…of navigating racism by transitioning from an integrationist position to one of self-determination" (McInnis).

The "PRINCE-iple Lessons" here highlight the intersection between artist and activist that many musicians employ in some aspect of their work, especially when the historical, cultural, and/or political moment calls for it. Prince exemplifies a 20th-21st-century musical artist championing the black community and providing an "innovative and compelling 'alternative location of knowledge production' … [b]y harnessing and molding the cultivated music tradition and its attendant activities to suit [his] activist needs" (Karpf 626). At the same time, these allow him / his music to reach a broad audience. Thus, Prince deploys his lyrical skills in both entertaining and didactic ways that encourage, inform, and inspire listeners to action and admiration.

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She's Always in My Hair: Jill Jones–The Unheralded Muse of Prince

by De Angela L. Duff

Abstract

Prince has had many female muses, many being key collaborators in the making of his music. While others fit the classical notion of what a muse can be, none of them have contributed to Prince's music, directly, as much as Jill Jones has. Jones was Prince's secret weapon during the most critical period of his career, and her voice was the glue that held a prolific number of Prince recordings together. Prince's complicated relationship with Jones is exhibited most by the five years it took him to finish her eponymous debut on Paisley Park Records in 1987. Sometimes she was in the spotlight as she was during the films, *Purple Rain* and *Graffiti Bridge*. While at other times, she was literally behind the curtain as she was during the *1999* tour, singing for Vanity 6. Regardless, she was always there–*always in his hair*–even if her presence was not seen most of the time. Jones' contribution to Prince's legacy is rarely discussed and this has been exacerbated by her absence on the credits of the 2017 posthumous release, *Purple Rain Deluxe*. Why and how Jill Jones, the white fox, deserves to be recognized as Prince's secret weapon will be revealed and deconstructed.

Keywords: Prince, Jill Jones, Wendy and Lisa, Teena Marie, protégée

"To be invisible will be my claim to fame…"
~Gladys Knight and the Pips, "To Be Invisible," *Claudine* Original Motion Picture Soundtrack

After Prince's death on April 21, 2016, dozens of commemorative or special edition magazines were released to celebrate his life. In all of these issues, articles about Prince's women, protégées, or collaborators abounded. In almost every single issue, Jill Jones was not listed. In *People* magazine's special collector's edition, June 2016, Prince's wives (Mayte Garcia and Manuela Testolini), girlfriends, according to this publication, (Apollonia, Madonna, Sherilyn Fenn, Sheila E., Kim Basinger, Vanity, Carmen Electra, and Vanessa Marcil), and muses (Sheena Easton, Alicia Keys, Wendy & Lisa, and Susanna Hoffs) were listed in "The Women He Loved" by Gillian Telling, but Jones was not. In *Time* magazine's commemorative edition, June 2016, Apollonia, Diamond and Pearl, Sheila E., Sheena Easton, Carmen Electra, Mayte Garcia, Judith Hill, Alicia Keys, Janelle Monáe, Vanity, Wendy and Lisa, and 3rdEyeGirl were all listed, but, again, Jones was not in "Prince's Protégés" by Jessica Goodman. In "The Women In His World" by Camille Dodero in *Billboard* magazine, May 2016, the most exhaustive list released that year, Sheila E., Patrice Rushen, Susan Moonsie, Vanity, Stevie Nicks, Apollonia, Wendy & Lisa, Susannah Melvoin, Apollonia, Chaka Khan, Sheena Easton, Susanna Hoffs, Kristin Scott Thomas, Cat Glover, Kim Basinger, Sinéad O'Connor, Ingrid Chavez, Carmen Electra, Mavis Staples, Mayte Garcia, Martika, Manuela Testolini, Bria Valente, Misty Copeland, 3rdeyegirl, and Lianne La Havas were all listed, but, again, Jones was not. In addition to Jones' absence in these articles, in 2016, her image was also misattributed to Ingrid Chavez in a well-known promo shot from the film, *Graffiti Bridge*, in multiple major publications, including *Rolling Stone* magazine. Even though Jones and Chavez had significant roles in the film, none of the publications fact checked the image and continued to replicate the egregious error.

The absence of Jones in Prince's narrative is not a recent phenomenon. She was omitted from these lists before Prince passed. In "Let's Pretend We're Married: A Guide to The Lovely Ladies in Prince's Life" from *Giant* magazine, September 2007, Kim Basinger, Sheila E., Nona Gaye, Apollonia, Vanity, Mayte Garcia, Manuela Testolini, Susanna Hoffs, Madonna, Wendy & Lisa, Troy Beyer, Carmen Electra, Sheena Easton., Susan Moonsie, Susannah Melvoin, Ingrid Chavez, Robin Power, Sherilyn Fenn, and Ananda Lewis were listed but, again, Jones was not. *Ebony* magazine is the one publication that often gets it right. In the June 2016 issue, Miles Marshall Lewis does list Jones as being a key collaborator of Prince in "The Beautiful Ones." However, the article's accompanying illustration depicts Esperanza Spalding, Mayte Garcia, Vanity, Sheila E., Apollonia, Judith Hill, Liv Warfield, Anna Garcia, Lianne La Havas, Wendy Melvoin, Misty Copeland, and Manuela Testolini, but not Jones. On the cover of November 1987, *Ebony* magazine had previously recognized Jones, positioning her between Vanity and Apollonia where she rightly belongs in Prince's legacy.

Jones was Prince's constant collaborator for eight years, 1982 – 1990, being one of Prince's most prolific and longest musical partnerships during the early years of his career with the exception of Dr. Fink. Despite her contributions to his legacy during the most critical time of his career, Jones is often unmentioned, unknown, and rarely discussed, except by diehard Prince fans. Yet, this paper will reveal why Jones is central to Prince's narrative, proving that for eight years she was his secret weapon, while also deconstructing why Jones is often invisible in Prince's story. However, Jill Jones has her own story, prior to Prince.

Jones was born in Lebanon, Ohio (a small town between Dayton and Cincinnati), in 1962. She is bi-racial. Her mother, Winnie Martin Jones—a model, singer, and Playboy bunny—was African American and Native American, and her father, a jazz drummer—was Italian. Earl Jones, Jill's uncle, was Prince's hairstylist from 1983 to 1989. Jill Jones eventually moved to Los Angeles to live with her mom where she attended Beverly Hills High. Lenny Kravitz attended the school as well and, according to Jones, herself, on Michael Dean's *The Prince Podcast*, Kravitz had a huge crush on her. Her stepfather, Fuller Gordy, was the older brother of Berry Gordy, the founder of Motown Records. As a result, Jones was surrounded by musical royalty before she met Prince. Stevie Wonder, Diana Ross, Rick James, and many others on the Motown records roster would attend the Gordy family gatherings where Jones would be present.

Because of her family's music industry connections, Jones had a musical career before she met Prince. At thirteen, she began recording background vocals for Tata Vega, who was an artist on Tamla Records, a Motown Records subsidiary. Teena Marie was Jones' first musical mentor and the older sister that Jones never had. In the beginning of her career, Marie's manager was Jones' mom. Marie lived with Jones and her family, when Jones was in high school. Jones eventually co-wrote two songs with Marie, "Young Girl in Love" on *Lady T* and "The Ballad of Cradle Rob and Me" on *It Must Be Magic*. She sung background vocals on four Teena Marie albums: 1980's *Lady T* ("Behind The Groove," "Lonely Desire," "Aladdin's Lamp," "You're All The Boogie I Need," "Young Girl In Love," "Why Did I Fall In Love With You") and *Irons in the Fire* ("Young Love," "Chains," and "You Make Love like Springtime"), 1981's *It Must Be Magic*, singing background vocals on the title track, as well as the song "365" and the classics, "Square Biz" and "Portuguese Love," and 1984's *Starchild*. Not only did she sing background vocals for Marie, she also sang background vocals on "My Baby Loves Me" by Jean Carn,

alongside Jean and Iris Gordy, Fuller Gordy's daughter, on 1982's *Trust Me*, and was the cover girl for Ozone's 1982 album, *Li'l Suzy*.

Jones' musical career has also continued without Prince. She contributed a track, "The Ground You Walk On," to 1989's original motion picture soundtrack for *Earth Girls Are Easy*, produced by legendary producer and musician Nile Rodgers. She also sang lead for other artists, such as the renowned Japanese composer and musician, Ryuichi Sakamoto, on his 1990 single, "You Do Me," from the album, *Beauty*. She was also featured prominently in the video for the track. Jones co-wrote and produced "The Great Pretender" for Lisa Lisa's first solo album, *LL77*, released in 1994. She sang background vocals on the song, "Oil for the Lamps of China," the debut single from the 1994 debut album *Still Life* by The Listening Pool, an English band comprised of three former members of Orchestral Manoeuvres in the Dark (OMD). In 1996, Jones toured with Chic as the co-lead vocalist, alongside Sylver Logan Sharp. Subsequently, the tour was memorialized on 1999's *Live at the Budokan* CD and DVD. Also, in 1996, she contributed vocals on "Rock Man" and "In Deep" on Paolo Rustichelli's *Mystic Man*, which also featured contributions from Carlos Santana and Miles Davis. She also recorded other covers beyond Prince's "With You," including Blondie's "Call Me," produced by legendary DJ, producer, and remixer, Todd Terry for a remix tribute to Giorgio Moroder (*DJ Empire Presents: A Tribute to Giorgio Moroder*) in 1999, as well as Carly Simon's "Why" on Ronny Jordan's 2000 album, *A Brighter Day*. Jones was also featured on the 2014 single "This is How to Feels" by Italian techno act, Get Far.

Since her contract with Paisley Park Records expired on April 15, 1993, Jones has released three albums: 2001's *Two* with Chris Bruce, 2004's *Wasted* with The Grand Royals, and 2016's dance offering, *I Am*. She also released a single, "Bald," in 1993 on Flying Records, co-written and produced by Paolo Rustichelli, and another single, "Miss You," a heartfelt tribute to Prince on Akashic records in 2016. The accompanying video for "Miss You" reflected some of her past, iconic looks including the captain's hat from the *1999* tour and video. With all of her musical output and contributions, especially on work core to the history of popular music, one wonders why Jones has not been more celebrated as an individual artist and as one who played a significant role in the shaping of Prince's career and legacy.

Jones met Prince in 1980 on Prince's *Dirty Mind* tour. Teena Marie was the opening act for this tour, and Jones was singing background vocals for Marie. Jones' first live appearance opening for Prince in Marie's band was December 4, 1980, at Shea's Buffalo in Buffalo, New York. Two years later, Jones would be singing background vocals for Prince on his *1999* tour. Her first appearance in Prince's band was on November, 11, 1982, at the Soldiers and Sailors Memorial Auditorium in Chattanooga, Tennessee. After the *Dirty Mind* tour, Prince was in Los Angeles, California, recording quite excessively at the recording studio, Sunset Sound. Jones began recording with Prince for Prince's fifth album, 1982's *1999*. She sung on the title track, "Automatic," and "Free." She was also *the* "Lady Cab Driver" (Thorne 255). While Jill is credited as the "Lady Cab Driver" on the *1999* album liner notes, she also thinks that she may have been the inspiration behind the song. On 2016's *The Dirty Nerdy Show*, Jill Jones revealed, "A lot of 'Lady Cab Driver,' I believe, you know, it was never said to me… but I drove him everywhere, through that time. He had just gotten his new BMW, it was here in L.A. and I drove it. I drove that freaking car all the time, and I drove him around." (ChristopherNotWalken)

Jones is mysteriously credited as J.J. in the liner notes of *1999*. In "Pop Art" featured in the Prince special edition and final print run of *Wax Poetics* magazine, Issue 67, February 2018, Michael Gonzales wanted to know why her initials were used instead of her full name. "Prince liked to have an air of mystery," Jones responded, "so when I asked him why he put J.J. instead of my name, he said, 'Let the fans wonder who you are.' He just didn't want to put the whole name out there yet." On the inner sleeve for *1999* which features the band, Jill Jones is conspicuously missing, even though she was on the *1999* tour, also known as the Triple Threat tour because it featured Vanity 6, The Time, and Prince in that order. Jones did double duty on this tour by singing background vocals for Prince and providing additional vocals for the opening act, Vanity 6 from behind the black fishnet and pink curtain. She's also very present in the videos for "1999" and "Automatic," as well as promotional appearances such as *Solid Gold*, a music tv series, in 1983. While the use of mystery often helped Prince's career, the combination of not revealing Jones' full name and not including her in key promotional materials for his music, unfortunately, rendered her nearly invisible and lessened the credit she so rightly deserves as one of Prince's key collaborative partners, which would have helped her career and legacy post-Prince.

To this point, when most people think of Prince's key female collaborators, Wendy and Lisa are usually the first to come to mind because they are forever immortalized in the magical, musical performances of the blockbuster film, *Purple Rain*. In various interviews, Prince made a point to compliment and credit them for their role in his creative process, going so far as posing in between them for a coveted *Rolling Stone* cover on April 24, 1986. Prince's public acknowledgement would serve them well as they were able to use those verbal and print accolades, alongside real album credits as opposed to fictional ones as Prince was often apt to do. They would go on to develop a very lucrative and critically acclaimed career as a solo act and as musical directors for various television and film projects because of their visibility.

Wendy and Lisa were, and still are, often synonymous with The Revolution, and, more times than not, the face of the band. However, if one looks closely at the *1999* album cover, Prince "and The Revolution" is drawn backwards. So, Prince and The Revolution did not begin with *Purple Rain*, but with *1999*. Jones was very much a part of the *1999* album, even more so than Wendy. In the main credits, Lisa and J.J. are featured prominently. Wendy is only listed in the credits for the song, "Free." However, Jones contributions during this period are never acknowledged and praised, but Wendy and Lisa's often are.

In addition to singing background vocals on Prince's albums, Jones was the voice that held a prolific number of Prince productions together. She provided background vocals on numerous, released Prince and Prince-produced albums, not including her own debut which was also produced by Prince: Sheila E.'s 1984 *The Glamorous Life* (the title track, "Noon Rendezvous," "Next Time Wipe The Lipstick Off Your Collar," all uncredited except for "The Belle of St. Mark," and "Oliver's House," credited as J.J.), The Time's 1984 *Ice Cream Castle* ("My Drawers" and "If The Kid Can't Make You Come," uncredited) and 1990's *Pandemonium* ("Chocolate" and "My Summertime Thang," credited, but actual participation is uncertain), Apollonia 6's 1984 eponymous debut ("Happy Birthday, Mr. Christian," "Blue Limousine," "A Million Miles (I Love You)," and "Some Kind of Lover," all uncredited except for "Oo She She

Wa Wa," credited as J.J.), Prince's 1982 *1999,* 1984 *Purple Rain* ("Take Me With U" and "Baby I'm a Star," uncredited), 1985's *Around The World In A Day* ("Pop Life," uncredited), and 1987's *Sign O' The Times* ("It's Gonna Be A Beautiful Night"), and Mazarati's 1986 eponymous debut on Paisley Park Records ("Strawberry Lover" and "I Guess It's All Over," credited as J.J.). She also sang background vocals for Prince's "Good Love," the first track on the 1988 *Bright Lights, Big City (Original Motion Picture Soundtrack)*, starring Michael J. Fox. She also contributed to the 12" singles "Pop Life" (1985) and "Kiss" (1986) for Prince and The Revolution and other Prince-produced singles, including 1985's "Manic Monday" for The Bangles, which Prince originally wrote for Apollonia 6, Andre Cymone's "The Dance Electric" from his album, *AC,* and "Modernaire," a song performed by Dez Dickerson, Prince's first touring guitarist, in the film *Purple Rain,* where Jones' background vocals are reversed. Jones has also been documented as singing on several unreleased tunes from Prince's vault, including 1983's "No Call U," "Promise to Be True," a song considered for Dez Dickerson, "Vibrator," a song considered for an unreleased second Vanity 6 album, and 1984's "Our Destiny;" however, a version with Lisa Coleman, singing lead instead of Jill, was released on *Purple Rain Deluxe.*

Several unreleased songs from Prince's vault were included on the 2017 *Purple Rain Deluxe* release. And, to her credit, Jones collaborated with Prince on several of the previously, unreleased tracks ("Love and Sex," "Possessed," "Wonderful Ass," and "We Can Fuck") pulled from Prince's vault and included on *Purple Rain Deluxe*. Yet, she was not listed anywhere in the credits. Jones had to take to social media to prove that she was a part of the *Purple Rain* legacy by showing the handwritten lyrics to "Wonderful Ass," one of the songs for which diehard Prince fans were waiting for years to obtain, by showing her handwriting alongside Prince's. Even with this evidence, many of Prince's diehard and casual fans are simply unaware of Jones' input to Prince's music.

A major reason that Jones is often under credited in her contribution to Prince's legacy is the mishandling of her debut album on Paisley Park. Prince took five years to complete the *Jill Jones* eponymous LP, released on May 26, 1987. In a 2013 interview, "The Question of U: Jill Jones Talks 2 Beautiful Nights," on the *Beautiful Nights* blog, Jones described the experience as "a very long pregnancy" (Dyes). The time Prince took to complete this album is an anomaly as compared to his usual, speedy production pace. For example, he recorded the *Madhouse 8* album in only four days. On Michael Dean's *The Prince Podcast*, Jones offered that the reason why she thinks Prince took so long to finish her record was because he didn't want to let her go. Jones offered, "I think he had a hard time letting go of people, once everybody started leaving. You know, Morris had left. Vanity left… Me and Jerome were the last two… sitting there… We were the ones who he clung really hard to and almost forced us to stay. Like, forced us." (Dean) Jones had always been someone on whom Prince could rely, and he knew that he could count on her unconditionally. The loss of Jones would not only be the dissolution of a long, musical partnership, but also companionship and a very, deep friendship**.**

Jill Jones is often cited as, if not the best, one of the best releases from the roster of Paisley Park Records, Prince's subsidiary record label on Warner Brothers. In "Pop Art," Gonzales also wrote that, "Thirty years later, *Jill Jones* remains the best album released bearing the Paisley Park label," and exclaimed that *Jill Jones* was "a timeless record that still sounds as though it were recorded tomorrow." While Jones was given full writing credit or co-writing

credit on all of the songs with the exception of the Prince cover, "With You," Prince was the sole writer of all the tracks, registering them at the Library of Congress under the pseudonym of Joey Coco. Prince would often give song credits on some records to the artists he was producing when they had not contributed at all, and, alternately, he would not give artists song credits when they had contributed. This perplexing habit continued with Jones, even though she had already proved her songwriting chops by writing with Teena Marie. Many of the tracks were recorded in Minneapolis, and the rest were recorded at Electric Lady Studios (the recording studio Jimi Hendrix custom built) in New York with producer, David Z., brother to Bobby Z. (The Revolution's drummer).

Jill Jones contains eight songs. Several of these songs had been considered for other Prince productions over the years. "Violet Blue" was the only song specifically recorded for the album in 1987. "Mia Bocca," the first single from the album, contained a non-album track, "77 Bleeker Street," which had musical overdubs by Prince on the flip side of the vinyl single, also known as a b-side. The track was produced by Jones and David Z. (David Rivkin). The instrumental of "Mia Bocca," which prominently featured a luscious string arrangement by Clare Fischer, was featured in Mary Sharon's birthday scene from the Prince film, *Under the Cherry Moon* in 1986. In the same interview on the *Beautiful Nights* blog, Jones revealed that the inclusion of Fischer's orchestration cemented the record's ultimate fate:

> We made a decision to take a lot of the poppy songs off. Once Clare Fisher puts the strings on it... I wanted to leave them on... That's where I sealed my fate to never have a hit record... [Prince] could have given me "The Glamorous Life". Sheila E. would come to the studio to play basketball, and I did not know that the child was going in [to the studio] late at night and singing the songs... (Dyes)

"G-Spot," the second single, was going to be in the film, *Purple Rain*, when Vanity of Vanity 6 was originally the lead. According to Princevault.com, both Vanity and Jill Jones cut lead vocals for it at Prince's Kiowa Trail Home Studio in Chanhassen, Minnesota in 1983. "Baby Cries (Ay Yah)" was the b-side which contained absolutely no musical input from Prince. 1985's "For Love" was the album's third, final single and the only one that contained an album track as a b-side, "Baby, You're A Trip." "All Day, All Night" is a song Prince performed live at the club featured in *Purple Rain*, First Avenue in Minneapolis, Minnesota, on his birthday June 7, 1984. Jones cover of Prince's song, "With You," from his 1979 self-titled, second album did not have any musical input from Prince. "My Man" was also recorded in 1985. The final track on the album is 1982's "Baby, You're A Trip," a brief variation of the tune is featured in the intro to the album for a perfect bookend. Prince gave Jones and David Z. unprecedented artistic freedom and control in the studio as compared to other artists who were under his wing for album projects up until this point. In his book *Pop Life*, Dave Hill corroborates her agency by stating, "Jill Jones is the female Prince protégé who sounded most like herself" (**136**). There were several other Prince penned songs considered for this release on which Jones contributed vocals, including: 1980's "Rough," 1982's "Boom, Boom (Can't U Feel the Beat of My Heart)," 1982's "My Baby Knows How 2 Love Me," 1985's "Living Doll," "Married Man," "My Sex," and "Killin' at the Soda Shop." Whether on her own Paisley Park Records release or on records for Prince and other Prince-produced artists, there is hardly a place where Jones' voice is not present in Prince's early legacy.

The sepia-toned video for "Mia Bocca," was filmed in Mexico and directed by French photographer and music-video director Jean-Baptiste Mondino, who later photographed Prince's iconic, *Lovesexy* album cover and directed Prince's video, "I Wish U Heaven," for the *Lovesexy* album. However, due to its sexuality, which is tame in comparison to videos of today, there was resistance from MTV to play the "Mia Bocca" video in prime time because of the Parents Music Resource Center (PMRC), which Tipper Gore, the wife of Al Gore, formed. Number one on PMRC's filthy fifteen was Prince's "Darling Nikki" from the *Purple Rain* soundtrack. Number two was the Prince penned and produced, "Sugar Walls," performed by Sheena Easton. Coincidentally, in Duane Tudahl's 2017 book, *Prince and the Purple Rain Era Studio Sessions: 1983-1984*, Jones remembers, "'Sugar Walls' was supposed to be my song" (Tudahl 241). After a series of Senate hearings, the record industry agreed to meet the PMRC's demands and implement the infamous "Parental Advisory: Explicit Lyrics" stickers. In the interview for the *Beautiful Nights* blog, Jones corroborated that "Tipper Gore was on our ass. (MTV) banned my video (for the single "Mia Bocca"). They would only play it in the middle of the night, at 3 am... She directly impacted my life, she actually did in a weird way..." (Dyes).

While the *Jill Jones* album garnered critical acclaim, it didn't fare well in terms of sales because Warner Brothers didn't aggressively promote any releases from Paisley Park Records. On Michael Dean's *The Prince Podcast*, Jones revealed that she should have been more aggressive about her own business but recognized that she was quite young at the time. In *Prince: Inside the Music and the Masks*, Ronin Ro offers that "with Prince multitasking, things at the label changed" (Ronin 160). A huge part of Prince's multitasking was managing the expenses of the recently opened albatross of Paisley Park Studios which officially opened on September 11, 1987. "'Warner was handling the business as far as public relations... But Warner wasn't providing much,' she [Jones] added. Prince 'was distracted and detached…'" (Ronin 160). The album failed to enter any US *Billboard* magazine charts, but the album did fare well in Europe. A UK Warner Brothers executive, Rob Dickens, put money into the project to film the "Mia Bocca" video and do promotion in Europe. In the interview for the *Beautiful Nights* blog, Jones recalls:

> The album was dead in the water. Then, I went to a function, and I think I was crying. A Warner Brothers executive (Rob Dickens, CEO of Warner Brothers UK) saw me, and he put money into the project to do promotion in Europe. We made the (music) video (for the single "Mia Bocca")...They (Europeans) always liked Josephine Baker, that whole thing always worked (Dyes).

Perhaps, Jones was correct about the Josephine Baker effect. She made numerous interviews and TV appearances in Europe. In September 1987, she performed "G-Spot" at Sky TV studios in London, England, and for the Netherlands' *Countdown* TV series, and "Mia Bocca" for the *Bains de Minuit* TV series in Paris, France, and *Festivalbar* at Arena di Verona in Verona, Italy. *On October 17, 1987, she performed "Baby, You're A Trip" and "Violet Blue" for the Fantastico TV show* in Rome, Italy. In November of 1987 she also performed at a gala event at the Sportpaleis in Antwerp, Belgium, but the songs are unknown.

The reception to her live performances in the States, however, were tepid at best. On August 12, 1987, she opened for Level 42 at The Ritz in New York, NY, and also opened for Jody Watley in Los Angeles, California, who at the time was being produced by Prince's childhood friend and bandmate, André Cymone. In the interview for the *Beautiful Nights* blog, Jones exclaimed,

> I was discriminated against in my own country. I opened for Jody Watley in LA and, seriously, the crowd just stood there whole time with their arms crossed. I was angry dancing. I was singing "G-Spot," and I was like "I'm not going to shake my ass." I know (on past tours) I would go out in my bra and panties, but, then I put on my trench coat and I'd leave. I just threw the mike down and walked off the stage. Prince came to me and said "is that it, are you done?" Maybe he created the diva in me (Dyes).

In addition, at the time of its release *Jill Jones* did get some negative reviews. In *People* magazine's "Picks and Pans Review" from July 06, 1987, *People* magazine's staff wrote:

> In a misguided effort to prove her versatility, she sings each song in a different character. There's the herky-jerky Lydia Lunch delivery on "Mia Bocca," the breathy Sheila E. soprano of "G-Spot," and the topper, a chiding Carmen Miranda-as-battle-ax tone for "My Man." Jones may have talent, but it's hard to find under her frantic ambition" (Staff).

In 2016 on *The Soul Brother Show*, Jill acknowledged her eclectic delivery by saying that Prince didn't know what to do with her because she had so many vocal styles (Mr. Chris).

However, as the old man narrator overdubbed in the "Mia Bocca" video claimed, the world just wasn't ready for Jones yet, and she agreed in the *Beautiful Nights* blog interview:

> It was a really ace album, but the timing was way off. I don't think everyone was ready for it. Radio wasn't looking for it. There's a rap convention in Atlanta that I went to and people came up to me saying "you're Black? I didn't know you were Black! I would've played your record." I just came back to Prince, like, "should I just get a tan?" White people somehow knew I was Black, and they said "I'm not playing that house Negro on the radio…The album was dead in the water (Dyes).

In Autumn 1988, Jill Jones went to London, England, to work on songs for a second album with Chris Bruce, an American bassist and guitarist who has worked with Wendy & Lisa, Trevor Horn, Seal, Meshell Ndegéocello, and Doyle Bramhall II, Susannah Melvoin's (Wendy's twin) ex-husband. Eleven songs were recorded ("Deep Kiss", "Living Legend", "Long Time", "White", "Some Of Us", "Red", "Tango", "Ecstasy", "Revolutionary", "Sweet Liberty," and "Unattainable Love") and submitted to Prince to no avail. In response, Prince began developing songs instead: 1982's "My Baby Knows How to Love Me" and "Boom, Boom (Can't U Feel The Beat of My Heart?)", which were already considered for Jones' first album, as well as 1987's "4 Lust," 1988's "Am I Without U?," and 1989's "Flesh And Blood," but Jones' second album was never finished. In the article "Pop Art," Jones revealed, "It became difficult to do a

second record with him, because we were not approaching it the same way. He was putting more pressure on me, and it just wasn't working between us anymore" (Gonzales). In addition, Jones was unhappy with the musical and visual direction of the album. A video was even shot for "Boom, Boom (Can't U Feel the Beat of My Heart?)," but Jones did not want to be promoted as a sex object at this point in her career, as she also confirmed in her interview with the *Beautiful Nights* blog.

The rollercoaster of putting Jones in and out of the spotlight would be a maddening trend throughout her tenure with Prince. She's very visible in the film *Purple Rain,* as a waitress at the real-life First Avenue club featured in the film, but her musical performance of the unreleased track, "Wednesday," was removed from the film by Prince. While Jones was not in 1986's *Under the Cherry Moon*, Prince's second, self-directed, narrative film, she auditioned for a part and was in France while Prince was filming it. She is also noticeably missing from the "Girls and Boys" video which was recorded in France for *Parade*, the soundtrack for the film. As outlined in the "Rhythm & Blues" column in *Billboard* magazine in the Feb. 1, 1986, issue, she personally played *Parade* for Nelson George, American author, columnist, music and culture critic, journalist, and filmmaker, in person. Prince arranged this meeting between Nelson and Jones so that he would know who she was when *Jill Jones* was finally released. In 1987, Jones has a lead role in the unreleased film short, *Hard Life*, "misdirected" by Prince, which was to be a vehicle for Madhouse, as well as for Wally Safford and Greg Brooks, who are both featured prominently in the *Sign 'O' the Times* concert film. Her leading role in the film is evidence that Jones continued to serve as Prince's muse, even after several years of being in his camp**.** In *Ebony*'s "Prince's Intriguing Women," Lynn Norment wrote that Jones "may open Prince's *Sign O' The Times* tour," but this never happened. Yet, three years later, Jones was still a mainstay in the Purple Kingdom, playing The Kid's (Prince's role) girlfriend in the 1990 film *Graffiti Bridge*, Prince's third narrative film, which was also directed by Prince. However, her role in *Graffiti Bridge* was drastically reduced after Kim Basinger left the project and the script was revised. Unlike *Purple Rain*, in *Graffiti Bridge,* Jones was finally allowed to have her own musical performance in this film, but to add insult to injury she was reduced to lip synching to another female's vocals, Elisa Fiorillo, another Prince protégé, not her own. This was again a muzzling of Jones' voice. So, Prince constantly did this dance of having her be very visible for *1999* and *Purple Rain*, returning her to a box, so to speak, for *Under the Cherry Moon*, *Parade,* even though she is on the "Kiss" single, and *Sign "O" The Times*. Then, bringing her back for *Graffiti Bridge*.

Prince and Jones were obviously very close based on the sheer number of musical collaborations alone. Even though she was putting in a lot of work for him, there was also a very deep friendship and love between them. In the *Purple Rain* album credits, Prince wrote, "Jill–love." The word love was reserved only for her during the pinnacle of his commercial career. "She's Always in My Hair," the iconic b-side to the 1985 single, "Raspberry Beret," is often cited as being about Jones because of their enduring relationship. The beautiful friend in the song, "Hello," the b-side to the single, "Pop Life," is also Jones.

On the iconic, illustrated cover of 1985's *Around the World in A Day*, Prince's follow up to the massive success of *Purple Rain*, Jones is depicted as the old woman crying on the left side of the canvas. A closeup of the image of the old woman is featured as the cover image for the

single, "Pop Life." Jones questioned Prince once about the cover: "I asked him why he always had me crying, since that seemed to be my 'running theme,' and he said, 'because I am gone, you are sad'. I said where are you in this? He said, 'I am up the ladder'" (Jones Facebook Feb 7, 2019). With this gesture, Prince assumed that Jones would always be there–always in his hair. While she did ultimately leave Prince's camp, their friendship endured after years of estrangement. After Vanity's death in February of 2016, Jones was finally able to reunite with Prince two months before his own death. They made plans possibly to collaborate again, but this time for Jones' daughter, Azucena, who is following in her mother's footsteps as a singer.

So, why is Jill Jones being erased from Prince's narrative? Is it because she identifies as African-American? Is it because she does not fit the template of the dark exotic beauty established with Vanity and continued with Apollonia, Sheila E., and others? Regardless of why she continues to be invisible in Prince's story, Jones was Prince's secret weapon at a very critical time of Prince's career, and she should be recognized for it. In a note from Prince to Jones featured in her "I Miss You" video, he wrote, "Work hard & catch me 4 together we can make history..!" They did make history, but a lot of people do not know that "they" indeed made history. Jill Jones contributions to Prince's legacy must be acknowledged, as she was truly "willing to do the work." Jones was never just another one of Prince's women. She actively helped Prince realize his wildest dreams of success, respect, and recognition. Jones stayed the course whether in the spotlight or behind the scenes. She contributed to his music consistently and for a very long time, while others came and went. Clearly, Jones had her eye on the bigger picture of Prince's legacy, but the legacy of her own work should not be sacrificed because she so willingly sacrificed and shared her talent for Prince's.

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Dropping It on the One: Where Prince and Hip Hop Converge
by Satchel Page

If you're ever in the ride with me and I'm in control of the aux cord, or at a venue where I'm behind the turntables, you are guaranteed to get an eclectic mix of music. The full range of sonic artistry and human emotion will be on display flowing from Notorious B.I.G. to Chaka Khan, to Joe Henderson, to Black Sabbath, to Michael, to Nicholas Payton, to Blondie, to Project Pat, and on and on. However, believe it or not, there is method to all of the madness. It's not just some scattered, untamed mix. If category does, in fact, exist, I am very reluctant to ascribe to status quo. There are several issues with the way music is categorized. Some deal with the race and/or age of the artist, the target demographic of the product, and the overall feel of the product. Categorization becomes especially difficult when dealing with artists who naturally tend to be more fluid than others. These artists generally pull from a wide array of inspirations, not wholly regulated to the musical arts even, to craft a sound that strives for originality. One such artist is the timeless legend, Prince. Throughout his career, Prince effortlessly transitioned from sound and style, with recipes from all forms of Black music. Much like him, Hip Hop artists, such as Common, Mos Def, Erykah Badu, Outkast, and UGK, drew inspiration beyond their idiom and chose to explore all corners of Black music, connecting themselves to Mother Africa in the same way spirituals connected the enslaved to their homeland. In this way, Prince was an excellent parallel and blueprint for Hip Hop artists that followed him as his effortless bending, blending, and refashioning of all the music before him is what also lies at the core of Hip Hop—its ability to epitomize Leroi Jones' (Amiri Baraka) notion of "the changing same" where art and people mutate and evolve from necessity and the desire to achieve a potential of their wildest dreams. Prince was just another afro-headed black child who dared to defy America's notion about him and change the world, which is exactly what Hip Hop did.

I have never listened to music in the way that the industry has haphazardly categorized it. And my way of hearing music has afforded me the ability to see beyond those categories. I'm fully aware of the segmentations that have been created and equally as aware as to why those segments exist. Most listeners attach names to feelings or atmospheres that they believe these "genres" create. Words mean things. When someone says "Soul music" the ideas that come to mind are typically Black vocalists, whether a group or solo act, belting out lyrics and heartfelt wails over mid-tempo harmonies. "Rock" puts one in mind of some young White guys with long hair shredding on guitars and banging on drums. This can be done with any label that the industry force feeds us and tells us "this is what you're listening to." According to *The Guardian* article, "Genre Busting: The Origin of Music Categories," Jerry Wexler, a *Billboard* Editor at the time, created the term "rhythm & blues" in 1947 specifically to characterize Black pop to replace the much more repugnant term, "race records" (Matos). Yet, while Wexler may have been well intentioned, the result of this new category simply functioned to codify even more the manner in which African-American artists were confined into a limited space of expression while white artists were allowed to profit more without having openly to acknowledge the debt that their work owed to African-American culture.

From my personal experience, I released an album in 2012 titled, *Religion Guns Money.* I used the art of rap to convey my musical messages. However, after I had completed the album and listened to it several times, it occurred to me that the overall tone of the album was blues! I

had used rap to release a blues record! On a track titled "Work" I expressed my frustrations from trying to survive while being unemployed. The lyrics, "Times is hectic/water, gas, electric/hard to find balance with that shaky ass credit/can't save the mortgage/home foreclosures/sell the furniture or find a good storage…" are definitely blues-themed (and are certainly words that I no longer wish to experience). On the track I titled, "Gil,"—in honor of perhaps my favorite musician and writer, Gil Scott-Heron—the chorus displays the sentiment of the entire album: "The story behind the wounds/the women/the blues/ The winter in the soul killed the spring in the shoes/ The tread in the clay/threads the needle in the groove/ The hope for tomorrow/The Delta Man's Blues." I was able to pull from my personal struggles at the time after losing my job as a teacher and issues as a husband and father and married them to "bluesy" samples from Gil Scott-Heron, Roy Ayers, et al, to create a Hip-Hop Blues album. Where B.B. King played the guitar or Bobby Rush used the harmonica, I used rap cadence! The boom-bap of hip-hop still exists on this record to validate it within the rap spectrum. However, the theme of the entire project is directly connected to Delta Blues. It doesn't end there, however. When I went to a record shop in Hattiesburg, Mississippi, there was my album labeled under "Rock & Sundry"! Go figure!

As a young black youth in the 80s and 90s, I matured with Prince's music. I have vivid memories of house parties that my parents threw where Prince was a part of the soundtrack. When I was supposed to be in my room playing with toys or reading books, I would sneak to the door threshold and watch my parents and their friends dancing to "1999" and "Let's Work". Prince was very much a part of my household and my development. "Little Red Corvette" was another song that I remember vividly. As a young boy, I would sing the chorus, "Little Red Corvette! Baby you're much too fast", naively thinking Prince was referring to a car and not a young lady. It was this kind of storytelling that further drew me to study his music and others on a deeper level as I continued to age.

My parents were obviously selective about what content was appropriate for me as a young child. I didn't hear much of Prince's work pre-*1999* where he was breaking ground with his overtly-sexual recordings until I was approaching adulthood. His first masterpiece, *Dirty Mind*, seems pretty mild by today's standards, but for 1980, it was monumental with not only songs like "Head," "Sister," and the title track, but with the album cover as well. My parents kept me far from that album. I would not have been able to understand that Prince was doing more than delivering raunchy stories of incest, oral sex, and other taboo topics. He was also professing that freedom goes well beyond where the black behind can rest on a bus or who our classmates are. On "Uptown" Prince proclaims: "Now where I come from/ We don't let society tell us how it's supposed to be/ Our clothes, our hair, we don't care/ It's all about being there." I was barely crawling and didn't mind boo-boo on my ass when Prince wrote this so I can't say for sure how this may have made people born in the era of Malcolm and Martin feel. I do know how I felt some eight years later when De La Soul released "Me, Myself, & I" (1989) and Trugoy the Dove (one of the most criminally underrated emcees in my humble opinion) rapped: "Proud I'm proud of what I am/ Poems I speak are Plug Two type/ Please, oh please let Plug Two be himself/ Not what you read or write/ Right is wrong when hype is written/ On the soul, de la, that is/ Style is surely our own thing/ Not the false disguise of showbiz." Lyrics like these have made Prince, De La Soul, James Brown, Parliament, Betty Davis, and so many other Black musicians so important to our collective struggle in navigating through what it means to live and not just exist

in America. How do we first, connect with the mother continent, and then create and shape our own culture and destiny here?

It wasn't until Prince's early 90s work with the New Power Generation that I was mature enough to understand the complexities of his musicianship. Prince was more than just a singer with a sexual appetite as my youth would misguide me. But here is one of the greatest musical minds the world has ever known. A master at every instrument and songwriter/producer for himself and others, Prince, while not the originator, solidified Minnesota funk. And he did this by pulling from his vast musical inspirations to create a sound that was exclusively his no matter for whom he was producing.

On Prince's albums from this era, such as *Diamonds and Pearls* and *Love Symbol Album*/☥, he began to be much more blatant with his incorporation of Hip Hop. His late 80s output was leaning more towards the "rock" sound, and, as the 80s ended, Prince seemingly realized that he needed to be more aware of what Black America was consuming. He employed rapper, Tony M., on both *Diamonds and Pearls* and *Love Symbol Album*/☥. These albums not only sonically demonstrated Prince's leaning towards Hip Hop, but with songs, like "Jughead" and "Money Don't Matter 2 Night," he was still giving the establishment the middle finger. In the dialogue at the end of "Jughead," you hear Tony M confronting a shrewd wannabe manager:

Manager:	Tony, I can take you to the top…
Tony M:	…and you laughed at my brother, Little Richard, when he says you ain't gave him nothin'
Manager:	Let's leave him out of this
Tony M:	Hell, that ain't no joke. His songs are still sellin', that man could die broke

This sentiment isn't different at all from that of Lord Jamar on A Tribe Called Quest's "Show Business" from their opus, *The Low End Theory*, which, along with *Diamonds & Pearls*, was released in 1991:

> All you wanna do is taste the fruit/ But in the back they're makin' fruit juice/ You ask for slack and wanna get cut loose from the label/ Not able cos you signed at the table/ For a pretty cash advance, now they got a song and dance/ That you didn't recoup, more soup wit' ya meal?/ Cos this is the real when you get a record deal

Not only was Prince integral in my maturing and understanding the world, but Hip Hop was beginning to reach across America and had made its way to the west coast, Los Angeles in particular, where my family was living. My uncle, who was only 6 years older than me, introduced me to Run-DMC by not being in his room and leaving *Raising Hell* in his tape deck. That album blew my 6 year-old mind! Before reaching 2nd grade, I knew that entire album word for word and drum for drum. While mainstream America remembers Run-DMC's "Walk This Way," featuring the established Aerosmith, I was more focused on "Peter Piper" and their use of Bob James' "Take Me to the Mardi Gras" and the hilarious "You Be Illin.'" I made it my life's work to memorize this album all so I could rap it with my friends at school.

It never occurred to me that I had to differentiate between one (Prince) or the other (Hip Hop). In fact, what I have learned over time is that my natural ear is rooted in more than just my innate ability not to see genre. As such, when exploring the connection between Prince and Hip Hop and why it should be organic to be a lover of both—if you, in fact, love one, you must first understand that all popular American music is Black music. This is not saying that non-Blacks cannot and have not contributed to American music. But, firstly, all "genres" from America were created by Blacks. This dates all the way to Black enslavement when the enslaved first started playing traditional European instruments. Secondly, any movement forward in American music has been pushed by Black musicians. From Blues, to the "J" word, to Rock, to R&B, to Hip Hop, to whatever is next, Black musicians established the sound and was soon embraced and duplicated by others. Amiri Baraka's *Blues People* and *Black Music* are fundamental readings supporting this argument and have acted as bibles in my development. Currently, the movement to reclaim Black American Music is being pushed, in no short part, by musician Nicholas Payton, most notably with his profound article, "On Why Jazz Isn't Cool Anymore." In fact, Prince, himself, states on "All The Critics Love U In New York," from *1999*, "It's time for a new direction, it's time for jazz to die." Payton shares the same tone stating:

> Jazz died in 1959. There may be cool individuals who say they play Jazz, but ain't shit cool about Jazz as a whole. Jazz died when cool stopped being hip. Jazz was a limited idea to begin with. Jazz is a label that was forced upon the musicians. The musicians should've never accepted that idea. Jazz ain't shit. Jazz is incestuous. Jazz separated itself from American popular music. Big mistake.

Both artists highlight the shared frustration of many other musicians in the compartmentalization of their art, a compartmentalizing that confines the artists to certain packages that reinforces a racist structure and, ultimately, jeopardizes their marketing and earning ability.

With this in mind, it can easily be asserted that, because American music is Black music, one of its major aspects and issues is the manner in which it has been forced to navigate the poles of African-American expression of their socio-political condition to the double assault of European constraints and cooptation simultaneously. Genre is just one of these constraints. By confining an artist, album, or song to a specific genre, we regulate them. Art should just be art. An artist should be allowed to create freely using whatever medium one is inspired to use. I always like to say that no one dares to refer to Da Vinci as just a painter, or just a sculptor. In the same way, Miles Davis or Duke Ellington were never J*** musicians. Instead, they are musicians who happened to play some J*** tunes. Likewise, Prince has no home genre. Whether it was what we identify as Funk, R&B, Soul, Rock, J***, or anything else, Prince mastered it. Certainly, he was above the barriers that genre creates. His 2001 album, *The Rainbow Children*, is such an album that displays his ability to move easily beyond classification. He can easily provide a mellow groove like "Muse 2 the Pharaoh," a groove that I'm sure most would consider J***, and then turn right around and get funky with "The Work Pt. 1". Of note with "Muse 2 The Pharaoh," it's amazing how Prince not only defies the concept of genre, but on this particular song he turns a romantic love song between man and woman into a search for a higher calling and connection to the universe. He begins with:

> If she could be the muse 2 the Pharaoh/ Then one day she might be queen/ If like Sheba, she then could bring presents and wine/ The helix, he might get between them in other words, intertwine/ With the ebony and milk of her thighs/ If she could be muse and let him decide/ Perhaps, she'll let him decide, she could be muse 2 the Pharaoh/ There is nothing he wouldn't give her see/ For the future of the nation rests in her belly/ And if the Proverbs of the 31 and verse 10/ Becomes the song she sings again and again/ She might be queen

And then ends with "So, there it is for all to see,/ Now what's beyond you and me/ Depends my friends primarily/ On how you view your role in eternity." Musically or lyrically, for Prince as with Hip Hop there was no boundary separating one form of music from another. To do that is to separate one idea from another. The body is not separate from the spirit. The romantic is not separate from the political. To think in this way is to think in halves rather than in wholes. And, for Prince, as with the tradition of African music, holistic living is the root and goal of all that is done, always returning to The One. Thus, a love song is a political song as Baraka states in "Black Art," "Let there be no love poems written/ until love can exist freely and/ cleanly" (1883). Since love cannot exist with oppression, a true love song is always working toward eliminating all constraints that limit the fullness of love.

To further connect Prince and Hip Hop, both are direct offspring of James Brown. It is no question that the Godfather of Soul is absolutely critical in being able to understand fully either of the two. Being a student of JB and his approach to sound makes Prince, Hip Hop, and so many others even more digestible and comprehensive. Among so many other features, Brown is notable for dropping it "on the one." The way he hit the down beat was integral in inventing Funk. And, his dedication to "the one" and maintaining an airtight rhythm made Brown the pioneer that we all can agree he is. The heavy accent on the one beat on "Cold Sweat" (1967) and "Get on the Good Foot" (1972) should provide sufficient examples. Similarly, one can hear that thump on the downbeat and the tight rhythms in pretty much all of Prince's Funk records, even when he was daring to be a little more experimental. Go to "Housequake" or "Sexy M.F." One can see an obvious James Brown influence. Also of note is the way Prince approached the rhythm guitar and bass, playing those respective instruments as if they were drums, something that Brown is also noted for originating. These elements helped to lay groundwork for Prince's masterful catalog. From Brown's "People Get Up and Drive That Funky Soul" (1973) to Prince's "Musicology" (2004), the connection is quite clear.

To put it bluntly, there is no Hip Hop without Brown. Rap may be a thing. But without Brown's breaks, I would estimate that over half of Hip Hop's finest songs, many of which have inspired others, would not exist. What is Hip Hop without the identifiable bass riffs of Bootsy Collins on "I Got to Move" (1970) or "Talkin Loud and Sayin' Nothin'" (1970) and the drum stylings of Clyde Stubblefield on "Say It Loud — I'm Black, and I'm Proud" (1969), "Mother Popcorn" (1969), and "Get Up I Feel Like Being a Sex Machine" (1970)? Gil Scott-Heron and The Last Poets gave Hip Hop its voice with "The Revolution Will Not Be Televised" (1970) and "White Man's Got a God Complex" (1971) respectively Through groups like Chic with "Good Times" (1979), Disco gave Hip Hop its cool. But James Brown is the backbone of Hip Hop. From Public Enemy's "Fight the Power" (1989), to De La Soul's "Stakes Is High" (1996), to Eric B & Rakim's "I Ain't No Joke" (1987),to J Dilla's "I Don't Know" (2000) from Slum

Village's *Fantastic Vol. 2*, the elements of Brown records from "Funky President" to "Funky Drummer" to "Mother Popcorn" were resurrected in the 80s and continue to thrive now. And, what all of these Hip Hop artists have in common with Prince is their undeniable and uncanny way to mine the aesthetic fields of history and recreate that history in a profound manner to speak to and shape their current times.

Another easy connection between Prince and Hip Hop is their ability to tackle taboo subjects in American culture and do it with flair, abrasiveness, and intelligence. As stated earlier, Prince broke ground with *Dirty Mind*. In my heavy digestion, I haven't found much that was as blunt and jaw-dropping as Prince addressing oral sex and incest during that era or eras before. And for the bulk of his career, Prince was always one to push the envelope when it came to sexuality. Prince helped to free American music from sexual naiveté. Prince, with others, worked to demolish the rigid walls of sexual freedom and identification, walls that have led to the depression and dysfunction of so many people. As displayed in the lyrics, Prince was not going to let sexuality be the barrier between he and the universe. Hip Hop, in a sense, is no different. While certainly displaying much more machismo and sometimes downright toxic masculinity, Hip Hop music has never shied from sexual topics. Sexuality in Hip Hop can be seen as both producer and product of contemporary society. From 2 Live Crew's explicit "I Wanna Rock" to the more subtle "Bonita Applebum" from A Tribe Called Quest, regardless of how abrasive certain songs may be, it can't be argued that many can identify with the lyrics although they may be afraid to admit.

But, Prince was not just sexual. He was also keen to the political landscape and unafraid to stand and voice the concerns of the people. As sexually aggressive as *Dirty Mind* is, the final proclamation of the album is an anti-war chant! What starts as a disco-funk record ends with "You gonna have to fight your own damn war 'cause we don't wanna fight no more!" On "Controversy", Prince's introspection, "Do I believe in God? Do I believe in me? Some people wanna die so they could be free," shows his desires simply to live his life and be the musician the mothership has created him to be without all of the attention on tabloid fodder. Moreover, Prince had his own way of weaving sexuality, politics, and even his spirituality. The album *Controversy* (my personal favorite), combines all of these themes on songs, such as "Ronnie Talk to Russia," "Do Me Baby," and the self-titled track. Especially later in his career, Prince made no qualms about his faith. Beginning with *The Rainbow Children* in 2001, Prince made musical devotions to a higher calling and did so without losing his musicianship and fire. Where Prince would tend to be more metaphoric before when it came to his personal spirituality, albums like *The Rainbow Children* and *3121* and songs like "Get on the Boat" with lyrics, such as "Look outside your window/ Tell me now what you see/ Coming up the mountain/ For a new philosophy/ Every single color/ Every race and every creed/ Lookin' for the truth y'all/ That's gonna set somebody free," show Prince being much less cryptic with this theme.

Of course, Hip Hop has a long history of conveying messages of social struggle, most notably including Public Enemy, of which Prince has explicitly admired and featured Chuck D on his song "Undisputed" from 1999's *Rave Un2 the Joy Fantastic*. Hip Hop freed young Blacks to address many topics in a manner that spoke directly to their demographic and in ways that were not belittling or condescending. To that end, what I love most about growing up Hip Hop is that I perceived Rakim, KRS-One, A Tribe Called Quest, NWA, et al. in that era as my

cool uncles. Especially being a youngster in the 80s and 90s when conservatism reignited by Reagan and Bush had many Black leaders from that time and in the past being vilified, it was important that Hip Hop counter those claims and instill positivity, pride, and self-love. Songs like "My Philosophy" (1988) from Boogie Down Productions and Ice Cube's "Endangered Species" (1990) are some examples. Ice Cube, with his commanding voice, shouted "If I was old, they'd probably be a friend of me, since I'm young they consider me an enemy." These sentiments were identifiable to me along with so many other young black men maturing in the 90s and early 00s. While 80s R&B was enduring multiple transitions in that decade, Hip Hop was able to establish itself as the voice for the young people and speak on our behalf, simply doing what Prince had done just a few years earlier, give voice to a new generation looking for it.

So when one examines Prince and Hip Hop music through these lenses, it should be easier to recognize the similarities between the two and realize that there isn't a natural wedge that separates them. Both are children/products of the times before them. And, just like me and my siblings (and I'm sure you with yours), while I have my own distinct features, we share commonalities that become even more prevalent when we are next to our parents. So, too, does Hip Hop and Prince. When you get beyond the technical features, you might be able to see that Prince is, in fact, Hip Hop. His creativity, his spirit, and his daring to be original are the same essential characteristics that made Hip Hop the frontrunner in the music world. But without the established Prince helping to push the envelope musically (and businesswise), Hip Hop would have been isolated and, thus, easier for mainstream America to target and criminalize. Returning to the idea popularized by James Brown, The One is where everything goes down. And there is oneness in all. One is the common factor in all. Peace Power & Blessings.

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How the Exodus Began: Prince and the Black Working Class Imagination
by Robert Loss

1. Introduction: Prince, the Working-Class Hero

The day after Prince's tragic death on April 21, 2016, an AFL-CIO blog post by Kenneth Quinnell eulogized the musician as a staunch representative of working people. "Few of America's artists have so well captured the plight of working Americans as Prince," the article stated, "putting him in the line of artists like Woody Guthrie and Bruce Springsteen as working-class heroes" (Quinnell). Such a characterization and lineage were rare descriptors of Prince during his lifetime, and whether in biographies, academic articles, or popular journalism, the connections between Prince, his music, and the working class have rarely been given much consideration at all. When they have, the emphasis has usually been placed outside of (though certainly not unrelated to) his musical works. The AFL-CIO article is emblematic in this regard, as one might expect. Like many others, Quinnell remembered Prince for his attempts to help launch or revitalize the careers of a wide range of musicians, nearly all of them Black or Latinx, and most of them women: contemporaries like the Time, Vanity, Sheila E., forebears such as George Clinton, Mavis Staples, and Chaka Khan, and younger artists like Tevin Campbell and Esperanza Spalding. Prince was also remembered for his consistent and frequent charitable work. Some of this was well-known during his lifetime, be it the legendary benefit show for the locally-based Minnesota Dance Theatre at First Avenue on August 3, 1983, at which he debuted most of *Purple Rain*, or his Rally 4 Peace concert in Baltimore (and the single "Baltimore") in May 2015 in response to the death of Freddie Gray while in custody of the Baltimore police, the proceeds of which benefited the NAACP and two Baltimore charities (Case). Other charitable and philanthropic activities were anonymous and came to light only after Prince's passing. For instance, Van Jones revealed that Prince had played a crucial role in founding and funding #YesWeCode, a "national initiative to teach 100,000 men and women from low-opportunity backgrounds to get footholds in the future tech sectors of society," was only revealed by his collaborator Van Jones in the days after Prince's passing (Einenkel).[2] Another connection to the working class, mentioned only in the AFL-CIO article, was that Prince had been a member of the Twin Cities Musicians Local 30-73 of the American Federation of Musicians (AFM) and the Screen Actors Guild-American Federation of Television and Radio Artists (SAG/AFTRA) for more than forty years.

A key sequence of events mentioned in nearly every article was Prince's battle with Warner Brothers in the mid-1990s over his contract and, more specifically, over the corporation's ownership of the master recordings of his voluminous body of work. This, of course, is the time period in which he changed his name to ☥ and wrote "Slave" on his cheek. There's no doubt that this sequence of events impacted Prince's music, but most commenters put

[2] For instance, only after Prince's death did we learn that in 2001, he paid nearly all of legendary James Brown drummer Clyde Stubblefield's hospital bills after a fight with cancer (Melendez). Another example of Prince's career-long dedication to philanthropy is the Marva Collins Westside Preparatory School in Chicago, to which Prince donated $500,000 in 1985 ("Prince Donates") and another $300,000 in the 1990s (Cheaney). In 1994, Prince featured Collins in the video for "The Most Beautiful Girl in the World," which was filmed at the school (Cheaney).

this very public dispute in the context of musicians' contemporary conflicts with record labels and capitalism more generally. For instance, Quinnell writes at the AFL-CIO blog that "[Prince] knew that taking on this battle would help others. So he took on the recording industry on behalf of music. On behalf of the industry's working people—the musicians themselves." That is undoubtedly true, but the statement demands more historical nuance. Prince's conflict with Warner Bros. began as early as 1990-1991, and initially it was motivated by the tension between his artistic prolificacy and his perception that Warner Bros. was failing to properly promote and distribute his work (Browne). However, this does not mean he was unaware of the history of record companies' exploitation of Black musicians and their art or the historical difficulty of integrating with hegemonic capitalist institutions controlled by primarily white men. From the beginning of his career, he had challenged this hegemony in numerous ways ranging from his recording methods to his presentation of himself as a gender- and racially-fluid person and performer. However, class and its intersections with race and gender were typically expressed in subtle or sporadic ways. What we see circa 1990-1995 in Prince's career is what many people, particularly people of color, encounter when they undertake an integrationist journey: an event, some tipping point, wherein the limitations and degradations of late capitalism and systemic racism can no longer be tolerated and inspire reconsideration and a different course of action.[3] In other words, Prince's existing class-consciousness was challenged by his circumstances, reckoned anew with the historical and contemporary realities of Black Americans, and was reconfigured into a more focused and consistent collective call for revolution, economic self-sufficiency, independence, and justice that would aim to benefit not only musicians but all people exploited by capitalism, especially the Black American working class.

This essay attempts to recover the relationship between Prince and the Black American working class. What is the story? Is it significant? Should we consider him a "working class" musician, or rather, what happens if we do? As I've noted, these questions generally have been focused on Prince's career rather than his music, despite the fact that, as Quinnell argues, songs such as "Ronnie, Talk to Russia," "Sign O' the Times," "We March," and "Baltimore" have "reflected the dreams, struggles, fears and hopes of working people." Thus, without diminishing the importance of the mentorship, advocacy, charity, and memberships by which Prince throughout his career aligned himself with the working class in general and working people of color more specifically, here I would like to take greater account of Prince's music: the signifiers, historical traces, and performative actions through which Prince spoke as someone from a Black working-class upbringing, spoke to the Black working class, and spoke about the historical and contemporary situations of the Black working class in the United States.

Why has Prince rarely been considered in this fashion from scholarly and pop music criticism perspectives, and when he has been, why have we tended to focus on his career more than his music? Answering these complex questions begins with the difficulty of defining "class" itself. Preceding from Marx's binary definition of the proletariat and bourgeoise and then Max Weber's tripartite redefinition of class by way of economic resources, status (or "standing"), and

[3] I'm grateful for the editorial feedback of C. Liegh McInnis here, who noted that "even W. E. B. DuBois, who is considered the father of Pan-Africanism, began has an integrationist, refused to work with Marcus Garvey, and is the reason that the Niagara Movement dissolved because of his forcing a white activist onto them that the rest of the members did not want."

political power, we have also placed an emphasis on education and, more recently, self-definition. However, in the era of late capitalism, correlation falters significantly. For instance, the social status, power, and symbolic capital conferred on the "college professor" does not correspond to widespread economic illness of the American higher education system in which two-thirds of that workforce consists of contingent (i.e., adjunct) and underpaid laborers (AAUP). This lack of correlation applies equally well to a working class which has shifted from the blue-collar industrial manual labor of the postwar era to the so-called pink-collar service labor of deindustrialized America. At times, each historical group has been lauded by politicians as essential to the American project, but this status has not stemmed the transfer of wealth to the top one-percent in the past thirty years. There is also the more fundamental lack of correlation between the labor produced by the working class and the material wages of that labor. Meanwhile, sociologists are keen to identify shared values, attitudes, and ideologies that mark certain classes, but these are equally complex. Can we say, for instance, that the American working class has a shared value of pragmatism? We know, of course, that class intersects with race and gender, but also geography, technology, religion, disability, and many other factors. Thus, when I use the term "Black American working class," of whom am I speaking? The urban postwar generation confronted with evaporating manufacturing work? Suburban millennials seeking employment after the economic collapse of 2008? How might a single term account for the wide historical diaspora of African descendants in the United States? Are we talking about economic resources, status, or power, or all three? Education? What shared values, attitudes, and ideologies? As the philosopher Kwame Anthony Appiah has recently stated about class in general, "The more variables we try to account for, the harder it is to solve" (144).

Enter into this, then, two difficulties posed by music: the individualities of the performers and the nature of performance itself. Both introduce high levels of subjectivity. The sociological tendency to assign group belonging or "type" to an individual runs headlong into the complexities of class mentioned above, to say nothing of its intersectional qualities. The sociological approach seeks a kind of authenticity, or verification, i.e., the correspondence of a musician's work to their biography, and their biography to a type of life. But life rarely if ever conforms to even the broadest class distinctions, and, of course, people change over time. Indeed, performance is an instance in time, unrepeatable but reproducible through recording, and always open to revision. These instances should be understood historically, even if they have the power through reproduction and collective memory to traverse history. Additionally, a sociological approach seeks empirical evidence, and thus, to overcome the subjectivity gap, it may assume that what is performed expresses the performing subject without qualification. Performance, however, is filled with masks. Through its sonic and verbal signifying, through media such as music videos and the expressions of fashion, popular music is capable of making what is imagined real as an aesthetic experience and, crucially, as thought which may be performed into reality by the audience. Thus, popular music is not merely a representation of existing class distinctions; it may also be an attempt to shape those distinctions, to shape reality itself, and to push reality toward some new vision or to recover a lost vision.

Accounting for each of these complicating factors—the problems of defining class and the ambiguities introduced by performance—will pose a challenge for the present essay. However, Prince's career and music offer a unique way of thinking through them, and in the essay which follows, I will attempt to do so. (It is certainly not meant to be the final word on the

subject.) By putting Prince's biography into conversation with the recent history of what we may call the Black American working class, I do not mean to suggest that Prince's story stands for all stories. We may recognize that Prince was unique and special even as we recognize that he belonged to a community and history. That tension, in fact, goes to the heart of his own journey. It is also important that we remember Prince was a musician, an artist. As such, his creative work is made of masks: genuine but at times fictional, or quasi-fictional, roles that he played for various purposes. In the sphere of the American Wow, that combination of pop music stardom and consumeristic spectacle, he often played different roles at different times—and for different audiences. His studio and live performances often destabilize the orders of meaning sought by materialist analyses of class and music, reflecting not just his own uncertainties and changing opinions but his desire to represent, signify, explore, hypothesize, and revise. In short, I'm guided by the belief that any critical appraisal of popular music must recognize that music, as an art form, rarely if ever resolves meaning, no matter how much we wish that it would.

The scope of Prince's career and musical works poses another challenge. One way of getting a handle on this complicated and lengthy historical narrative is to ask how Prince grew from the young man who sang, "Reproduction of a new breed/Leaders, stand up/Organize" on his 1982 song "Sexuality" to the man who repeated those union-inflected phrases on the title song of his 2001 album *The Rainbow Children*. Or how he went from singing "Let's Work" in 1981, a song in which work is playfully used as a metaphor for sex, to the man who twenty years later sings in the song "The Work, Pt. 1," also from *The Rainbow Children*: "Look around and tell me your Sun is Risen/ When your brothers and sisters are in the Fall/ What is left to give when your work is done?/ What do we own besides the right to crawl?/ See we're living in a system that the devil designed/ And suffering from this devil's most heinous crime/ He's tried to keep us from the reason we were born/ That is to be the living truth in human form." In brief, I'm suggesting two poles in Prince's artistic career: the early years, from roughly 1977-1989, in which he produced utopian visions that fluxed race, gender, and sexuality, and the latter years, particularly from 2001 to 2016, in which he forcefully spoke with a class-consciousness that explicitly connected racism to economic oppression and countered both with Afro-centric positivity, economic collectivity, and a deep sense of history in works like *The Rainbow Children*, "When Will We B Paid?" (a Staple Singers remake), "Dear Mr. Man," "Judas Smile" (in which he paraphrases a popular quote from Malcom X), "Black Muse," and many more. What, then, happened in between?

The ultimate destination of this essay is the interstitial period of 1990 – 1999, specifically the period between 1990's *Graffiti Bridge* and 1995's *The Gold Experience*, which marked a significant shift in thinking that proved to be fertile ground for Prince's development of a much keener and personally relevant class consciousness. While we should certainly consider Prince's battle with Warner Brothers from his initial private misgivings as early as 1991 to his public statements in 1993, his signifying use of slavery rhetoric, and his release from that contract in 1996—a release that did not, however, secure him ownership of his master recordings—I will demonstrate that these years were the culmination of his longstanding if often subtly expressed concerns about the intersection of race and class. From early on his career, arguably beginning with the 1980 album *Dirty Mind*, Prince's music had always been forward-thinking, arguably avant-garde in its rhetorical claims to a break with the past, and, at the same time, as a member of the "late boomer" generation, Prince communicated an albeit radical version of the American

Dream, i.e., the belief that talent and work could allow anyone to transcend their class origins. Given his success, Prince certainly had some reason to believe this. However, from the late 1970s and throughout the 1980s, the Black working class in the United States was dealt blow after blow by the neoliberal deindustrialization of the American economy coupled with the Reagan Administration's conscious rollbacks of the gains made in the Civil Rights era. Prince was not unaware of these demoralizing events. He sang about them vividly in songs such as "America," "Sign O' the Times," and "The Cross." But generally his position seemed to be above the fray, sometimes as a documentarian and frequently as a spiritual leader. Although his 1988 album *Lovesexy* addresses issues of drugs and violence caused by poverty on songs like "Dance O" and "Glam Slam (Escape)," Prince was perceived by many critics and audiences to be offering spiritual escapism as opposed to a spirituality that could provide a valid solution to material problems.[4] Prince also faced claims that he had become "out of touch" with not only the latest trends in music but specifically Black musical trends—especially rap—and Black America itself. By 1990, Prince was also confronted by declining sales and financial troubles, as well as dissatisfactions with his management and with Warner Brothers. In sum, it seems that around 1990, Prince began to better understand the ways in which capitalism and its class dictates were harmful to the Black working class *and* to himself. Rapidly, he seemed to be thinking more and more about what he had in common with the exploited laborers of the Black working class. This ideological shift was expressed in a musical shift. Prince began to more firmly ground himself in musical traditions of the Black working class while confronting the new expressions of that populace: hip-hop culture and rap. Ironically, given his apparent dismissal of rap a couple years prior, hip-hop not only forced his hand in terms of relevance, it also seems to have inspired his critique of the ways in which class, race, and the recording industry are entwined, a relationship which is but one example of how capitalism in the United States has historically worked against Black Americans.

In short, during this "middle" period of his story, in which Prince struggled to regain his superstar status, achieve artistic independence, and maintain his massive innovations of the 1980s while clearly doing some soul-searching about race, music, the music industry, and the social, political, and economic situation of his fellow Black Americans, Prince began more fully to understand himself as a historical subject of the African diaspora in the United States and a historical subject of capitalism, which is to say, of class. This historicity, this awareness of oneself as caught in the tides of the past, of one's limited power, and crucially, of one's common ground with others despite certain differences, set the stage for a greater sense of collective purpose which he would continue developing throughout the remainder of his life.

Ultimately I am less interested in whether or not we should classify Prince as a "working class musician" and more interested in how his work heard and responded to the Black working class. For that purpose, the insights of American Studies scholar George Lipsitz in his book *Time Passages: Collective Memory and American Popular Culture* will prove, I hope, incisive in laying a theoretical groundwork which shows how Prince had been imagining class from, in fact, the beginning of his career. We will begin with Lipsitz's theory of "dialogic criticism" before

[4] I'm indebted to C. Liegh McInnis for this succinct description of the perceived binary in Prince's music.

reconsidering the first phase of Prince's career and then moving into an interpretation of his music in the first half of the 1990s.

2. Dialogic Criticism

By necessity, like any of us, Prince interacted with the social, cultural, political, and historical situation in which he found himself. Those interactions are marked by successful and less than successful negotiations, assertions, reconsiderations, and risks, which means that his musical dialogue with the Black working class is filled with contradictions, ambiguities, and shifting opinions for which we must account. In the *Time Passages* chapter "Against the Wind: Dialogic Aspects of Rock and Roll," Lipsitz offers a compelling way to think through the ideals, realities, and tensions concerning the working class and popular music through what he calls "dialogic criticism," patterned after Mikhail Bakhtin's theory of the dialogic. While many scholars emphasize Bakhtin's concept of the polysemic, i.e., the multi-vocal dialogue within novels, it is the historicity of these dialogues which makes Bakhtin's theory a needed corrective to the supposedly free-floating, ahistorical tendencies of postmodern or late capitalist culture. Preceding from the notion that "[e]veryone enters a dialogue already in progress," Lipsitz writes that "[t]he dialogical model sees artistic creation as innately social and innately historical" (99-100). This would include popular music, as Lipsitz writes:

> Popular music is nothing if not dialogic, the product of an ongoing historical conversation in which no one has the first or last word. The traces of the past that pervade the popular music of the present amount to more than mere chance: they are not simply juxtapositions of incompatible realities. They reflect a dialogic process, one embedded in collective history and nurtured by the ingenuity of artists interested in fashioning icons of opposition. (99)

In other words, musical performance itself may be understood as a dialogic process within a broader social dialogue; each possesses indispensable historical dimensions, and this shared indispensability means the critic should not let them get too far from one another.

Lipsitz contrasts dialogism with musicological formalism and anthropological and semiotic criticisms' tendencies to obscure the music in question and resolve its temporality into fixed categories. All three approaches, argues Lipsitz, suppress affect and agency. Instead, dialogic criticism "connects affect to agency, and grounds social and ideological choices within the life worlds and collective memories of actual historical subjects" (102). Lipsitz doesn't explicitly define the connection between affect and agency, but we may consider this relationship in light of a typical Critical Theory (i.e., Adorno-esque) reading of popular music in which affect is the sentimental obfuscation of mass reproduction and dominant power relations which reduces the real agency of the performer and audience alike. Dialogism, on the other hand, understands affect to be the language and style, verbally and sonically, with which artists engage the past in the present. This leads Lipsitz to a defense of popular culture in general: "…the very sites where ruling ideologies can be articulated are also the places where they can be disarticulated" (108).

The appeal of Lipsitz's dialogic criticism is, in fact, the locating of a real and realistic agency for performers. Despite the historicity of his theory, Lipsitz is not suggesting that

musicians are powerless pawns of history, shaped and determined by material conditions; however, since they always enter a historical conversation, they are not free from history, either. For this same reason, a musician's conscious or even subconscious intentions do not regulate our interpretations. For example, when Lipsitz analyzes the ways in which Little Richard's "Good Golly Miss Molly" recontextualizes African rhythms, antiphony (call-and-response), and bent notes which resist Western mandates about "pure" tones, he doesn't argue that Richard was conscious of each and every historical trace (109-111). Neither does Lipsitz argue that Richard was unaware of these traces. The dialogic model recognizes instead that these forms and techniques were part of that "collective history" Richard inherited, tapped into, and through his "ingenuity," changed enormously with the introduction of a new "icon of opposition." Certainly musicians have their own understandings of collective history and their own perceptions of the degrees to which they reproduce or revise that history and its values, a tension we will see play out in Prince's music.

Helpfully for our purposes here, Lipsitz focuses on the Black working-class origins of rock 'n' roll, writing that while today rock 'n' roll may merely replicate "the triumphs of class hierarchies," writes Lipsitz, "it also identifies an unfinished dialogue about the potential of oppositional traditions" (109). This potential has special significance for Black American artists who wish, through new dialogues, to produce new traditions which might supplant present-day hierarchies of race, gender, sexuality, and class. The scholar Tricia Rose, author of the seminal book of rap criticism, *Black Noise*, has noted the relevance of dialogism to Black American art forms much earlier than I have. In her 1990 essay "Never Trust a Big Butt and a Smile" concerning Black women rappers, their marginalization in rap, and their rearticulation of feminism, Rose argues that "dialogism is especially productive in the context of African-American music. The history of African-American music and culture has been defined in large measure by a history of the art of signifying, recontextualization, collective memory, and resistance" (293). If collective memory is particularly endangered in our era of late capitalism since the market, through its promotion of innovation and progress, tends to recycle historic styles with minimal, if any, attachment to historical meaning or traditions, then the consequences of that endangerment are particularly dire for the cultures of the African diaspora, including those around which we cohere a definition of "Black working class culture" in the United States. This undeniably and fundamentally innovative culture—for example, the blues, Motown, funk, rap—has often been strategically and subconsciously overlooked, threatened with cultural extinction, and had its history rewritten by the dominant narratives produced by American mass media even as it has been celebrated. Thus, dialogism's recontextualization is often an attempt to save the context itself from oblivion.[5]

At the same time, collective memory in popular music spurs collective imagination: the conception(s) of a future within social groups which, through sounds, words, and the literal

[5] In this regard, Lipsitz quotes Richard Terdiman at length: "Dialogism…is a memory model. It seeks to recall the semantic and social history carried by a culture's language, but which tends to be forgotten, to be blanked, in the characteristic form of cultural mystification since the revolutions of the nineteenth century" (qtd. in Lipsitz 100). Of course, the enslavement of Africans two centuries prior demonstrates that forgetting was enforced much earlier than the Industrial Revolution and so-called modernism.

embodiment of those concepts by performers, is made real despite the ephemerality of performance and the limited materiality of a commercial product. If I were to offer a critique of Lipsitz's dialogic reading of music, it would be that not enough attention is given to the futurism often embedded in "icons of opposition." For instance, following his analysis of Little Richard's "Good Golly Miss Molly," Lipsitz argues, "Historically, Afro-Americans have treasured African retentions in speech, music, and art both as a means of preserving collective memory about a continent where they were free and as a way of shielding themselves against the hegemony of white racism. As long as Africa existed, as long as African forms contrasted with Euro-American forms, white racism was a particular and contingent American reality, not an inevitable or necessary feature of human existence" (111). What must be elaborated here is the degree to which resistance in the present performative moment imagines and instigates a future in which Black Americans are truly free. Music has never been just about the past (the memory of Africa) or the present (the "hegemony of white racism" and, though it goes unsaid here, the multinational, multiethnic African continent of today). "Good Golly Miss Molly," with its relentless drive and Richard's vocal abandon, is, like many early rock 'n' roll songs, a liberation song. It says, "There is a better day ahead, and it is *this* day, carried forward."

My point is simply that forms which occasion collective remembering usually also express a collective imagination, here understood as a futurity. So when, a bit later, Lipsitz writes that "[t]he rhythmic complexity of Afro-American music encourages listeners to think of time as a flexible human creation rather than as an immutable outside force," the implication clearly being, as he says later, "the mastery over time denied workers in the workplace," we ought to simply acknowledge that this thought, this thinking, is valuable and necessary to the effort of creating the real conditions in which we own that flexibility. Thinkers ranging from Tricia Rose in *Black Noise* to the late cultural theorist Mark Fisher in his slim polemic *Capitalist Realism: Is There No Alternative?* have argued, explicitly and implicitly, that popular music's subversive potential is the introduction of potential itself. In opposition to capitalism's argument that it offers all that there can be, a hallmark shift in the 1980s concurrent with the concretization of neoliberal politics, popular music, like other art forms, is capable of imagining an alternative—or remembering that one existed before and has been forgotten. The agency of potential makes a fully historical subject.

Throughout his career, Prince was engaged in a dialogic process common to all musicians whether he was aware of it or not—though, as I hope to demonstrate, he clearly was aware of this dialogue, and increasingly saw his music as the embodiment of a transhistorical cultural dialogue. What is the significance of understanding him this way? Let me offer one preliminary consequence as an example, one which I'll develop in the next section: Prince's work ethic. Throughout most of his career, he worked almost incessantly; there are documented and apocryphal tales aplenty in which Prince calls someone in the middle of the night to record a jam. Furthermore, he boasted about and valorized this work ethic in his musical performances, as in "Love 2 the 9's," from the Love Symbol album (), in which he raps, "Stay awake for fourteen hours/Listen to the band play New Power Soul." In live performance, Prince pushed himself and his band to work as hard as possible and integrated the rhetoric of work into the show. If "work" could be a playful metaphor for sex in "Let's Work," in his live performances, through sheer virtuosity and commitment to showmanship, it was a rhetorical figure which acknowledged the important function of concert-going and music in general for his audiences.

The celebration of one's own work ethic has a long history in Black American music; it is, in other words, a "trace…of the past that pervades the popular music of the present." By embracing James Brown's mantle as "the hardest working man in show business"—Prince never said this publicly, to my knowledge, but it was certainly communicated—and by consistently voicing his belief in knowledge, technique, and discipline, Prince consciously linked himself to not just the history of funk but a longstanding oppositional articulation against the racist stereotype of the shiftless Black male worker. Through performance, this was not just rhetoric for the benefit of Prince's status; it was enacted for the benefit of Black audiences. As McInnis notes, as Prince's star rose among crossover audiences, he began playing aftershows in small clubs, a "link to his local black tradition of live music" (55). These late-night jams were, among other things, "a way [for Prince] to stay connected to the community that may not be able to purchase a fifty dollar ticket" (56). Such aftershows were (and remain) rare for artists of Prince's stature, especially those whose regular sets often approached two hours in length.

In short, the dialogic perspective gives us a more nuanced way to consider Prince and the Black American working class from the beginning of his career, which in turn reveals a more complex and evolving series of valorizations, oppositions, ambiguities, and contradictions in Prince's music. As Lipsitz writes, "The problem for dialogic criticism is not whether rock music is oppositional or co-optive, but rather how it arbitrates tensions between opposition and co-optation at any given historical moment" (102). In other words, oppositional and co-optive tensions always exist but never exist in precisely the same way, and certainly not in precisely the same way for different people. Both subtle and overt negotiations will reveal something about that moment in time and the subjects in question. For our purposes here, I am most interested in how a dialogical approach reveals the tensions between Prince and the class imaginings of the Black American working class into which he was born; this depends on not just a sociological portrait of that class, its history, or even its own imaginings, but requires, also, an account of how Prince himself imagined the Black American working class' productive imagining of its own future in terms of wealth, status, and power.

Far from a monolithic dream of the future, these imaginings vary across time and place as they do among any social group. Neither can they be defined entirely by programs of collective action, e.g., unions or civil rights organizations. As Robin D. G. Kelley writes in the introduction to his important book *Race Rebels*, "Such an approach not only disregards diversity and conflict within groups, but it presumes that the only struggles that count take place through institutions" (4). At the risk of paddling without an oar, I will tentatively chart four ideological narratives within the Black American working class, each possessing a future-oriented or "imaginative" component. Three of them we may describe as integrationist, assimilationist, or co-optive in the sense that they do not challenge the dominant capitalist structure.

The first is the classic ambition to do better than one's parents and community through class mobility, ascending via the American dream—hard work, moral integrity, ambition, education, and individualism—into the material success of the middle class or above. This requires integration into the system of capitalism. For the Black American working class, the reality of systemic roadblocks is substantial, but that has not lead to the abandonment of this "upward mobility" imagination. However, a second, less common but still important narrative is the "making do" approach, which we might even understand as fatalist. In her sociological study

The Dignity of Working Men, Michèle Lamont writes of "black workers" who "find no romantic appeal to their own positions" and who "look at the other side of the fence as an unreachable ideal from which they are excluded by a lack of education, lack of resources, and lack of contacts. It is in this context that the American dream has a particularly mythic power for them" (119). The goal is not so much classic upward mobility or outright class migration as it is stability, and thus the future looks only incrementally different from the present. Here, moral integrity supersedes ambition and emphasizes generosity and solidarity (Lamont 46-51).

An alternative version documented so well by G-funk or gangsta rap—to which I will return in a later section—works parallel to but separately from capitalism through a para-economy that either tests or transgresses legality. Very much a result of the late twentieth century deindustrialization of American urban spaces and workforces along with the institutional racism of capitalism, this narrative nonetheless adheres to the values of consumerism and materialism and defines success based on materialism. The imagined future is two-fold: either continued separation despite economic gain, or a convergent version in which the capitalist structure becomes more inclusive of unique Black American individuals who have learned to manipulate that structure from its margins. Regardless, this para-economical ideology understands itself as a reflection of so-called legitimate capitalism. As Kelley argues in *Race Rebels*, "Their ambivalence to capitalism notwithstanding, gangsta rappers are consistent about tracing criminal behavior and vicious individualism to mainstream American culture" (201). In voicing this opposition, gangsta rap has functioned as a mirror, demonstrating how the para-economy replicates capitalist values no matter how much elites wish to ignore it or pathologize it as mere moral failure; integration will be slow and contentious precisely because the twin hegemonies of Whiteness and capitalism cannot admit publicly to their own corruption.

The final class ideology is oppositional and defines value by critiquing capitalism's individualism and liberalism, including its racist double standards, and by refusing, as much as possible, to integrate into hierarchical class structures. This version works collectively, laterally, and, at times, it has been expressed in revolutionary terms. Its contrast with integrationist ideologies has always had collective importance in the Black American community, of course, though it has often been described in a problematic binary fashion: DuBoisian uplift and integration vs. Garveyism's Black nationalism, for instance. While this collective ideology conflicts with the morality and individualism of illicit para-economics, it finds common ground in the value of self-determination and ownership of one's work. For instance, based on her research, Lamont argues that compared to white workers, Black workers in general "place greater emphasis on the collective dimensions of morality, solidarity, and generosity" (47). What differentiates the oppositional, anti-integrationist ideology, then, is the goal of alternative or radically rebuilt economic structures.

These are absolutely loose categories which speak to one another, and they are in no way confined to the Black working class. Like the narrative about Prince's career established in the first section of this essay, I offer this tentative map so that it may be complicated. What I want to emphasize here is that Prince undoubtedly moved through these different imaginations throughout his career and in his music with varying degrees of consciousness. For him, too, the divisions between these ideologies and narratives were porous. In the dialogic processes of his art-making, class imagination was always connected to race, gender, sexuality, religion,

geography, commercialism, media, the music industry, and technology, as well as the tensions between innovation and tradition and between idealism and realism. Class imagination was communicated in dialogue with his audiences, as reactions, provocations, sometimes carefully designed, sometimes intuited, alternating between the serious and the playful, as he responded to the world around him and tried to craft the world he wanted to see. But Prince's class imagination was also deeply personal, a product of his own upbringing in a Black working class family and community, and as such, class was a part of his ongoing dialogue with himself.

3. Prince, 1970s-1980s: From Optimism to Utopia

That John L. Nelson, Prince's father, was a jazz pianist descended from enslaved Africans is frequently noted in Prince's biographies. Far less discussed is that Nelson, having moved from Louisiana to Minneapolis in the late 1940s, worked for thirty-five years at the Honeywell corporation in Minneapolis as a plastic molder (Bream). Like many musicians, Nelson worked his day job and gigged on the weekends with his Prince Rogers Trio at various clubs, including strip clubs, but as McInnis demonstrates, Black musicians who desired a professional status played for well-paying white audiences while also "play[ing] for themselves to satisfy their love of the music and their desire to perfect their craft. This created very diverse musicians who had to learn to communicate on a variety of levels and languages" (52-53). No doubt this required a strong work ethic. Prince's oldest half-sister, Sharon Nelson, recounted in 2018 that John L. Nelson would go to his job at Honeywell at 7:00 a.m., and after putting the kids to bed by 7:30 pm, would play at his console piano through the evening (Bream). Named for his father's trio, and observing his father's dedication at home and in clubs—the apocryphal story of Prince watching his father play in a strip club through an outside window was confirmed by Sharon Nelson in 2018—Prince likely learned that even the pleasure of musical performance, when sought as a profession, required devotion to one's craft, which in turn meant sacrifice. At the same time, this work ethic meant adjusting one's repertoire according to class divisions, including those within the Black community. Citing the descriptions of Nelson's contemporary and record producer Jimmy Jam's father James Samuel "Cornbread" Harris, McInnis notes that lucrative "black functions" held by middle-class Blacks in Minneapolis meant "[t]here was not only a class division between the races, which was influencing the music; there was also a class division within the black race, which was also influencing the music. Mr. Harris' testimony shows how race and class division influenced the psyche and the work ethic of the musicians" (53). In this case, a musician's work ethic differs from the typical implication of that term in that it requires adaptability and ingenuity; it does not lead to a single style, but multiple styles.

We know that Prince witnessed his father playing in clubs, but so far as we know, he never saw his mother sing. Mattie Della Shaw, who was raised in Baton Rouge, Louisiana, met Prince's father when she began singing with his trio, but she quit when they were married (Touré 24). After Shaw and Nelson divorced when Prince was ten, he was forced to navigate an unstable home life. He lived briefly with his mother, who remarried, then moved in with father at the age of twelve but was eventually kicked out and briefly lived with his aunt, Olivia Nelson (Hahn 8-9). Eventually Prince found a more permanent residence with the mother of his friend Andre Anderson, later to become André Cymone with whom Prince formed his first band, Grand Central. Anderson's mother, Bernadette, was a surrogate mother for Prince throughout his teens and would be namechecked in the 1992 song "The Sacrifice of Victor." Biographies tend to

emphasize the instability of this period and its negative effects on Prince, but we should note, too, the strong work ethic evidenced by Prince's mother and Bernadette Anderson. Mattie Shaw began seeking a Master's degree in social work from the University of Minnesota after Prince had moved, and it seems reasonable to assume Prince knew this. He certainly was aware of the fact that she earned her degree and worked for over two decades in the Minneapolis public schools (Touré 32). Anderson, too, was pursuing a college degree while raising six children (Touré 34).

In sum, Prince matured in Black working class households which believed in the "class mobility" ideology typical of the civil rights generation, one that required determination, risk, and the ability to navigate racialized personal and professional relationships in an integrated cultural setting, and by his teenage years, Prince seems to have formed an optimistic attitude toward his potential for reaching at least a middle class standard. He told his high school newspaper in 1976, "Eventually I would like to go to college and start [guitar] lessons again when I'm much older" (Crawford). He worked diligently, even obsessively, at his craft; high school photos show him playing guitar in the hallway of the school, and in that 1976 interview, he advised, "One should learn all their scales" (Crawford). Grand Central and another Prince band, 94 East, were serious endeavors, and Prince took extracurricular high school classes on the music business (Hill 15). All of this informed Prince's success, but it would also contribute to Prince's eventual critique of the music industry's exploitation of musicians' intense labor.

For all that he was unique—a genius, even—Prince was also produced by his time. In his book *I Would Die 4 U*, the journalist Touré, wishing to establish Prince as an icon for Generation X, assigns great importance to the fact that Prince, born in 1958, belonged to the "late [baby] boomer" generation. While this generational approach risks oversimplifying or even misrepresenting what informed the vastly diverse populations falling under the monikers of "baby boomer" (and "Gen X")—he writes at one point that "boomers grew up in a positive atmosphere" (56), omitting the threat of nuclear war with the Soviet Union—Touré nonetheless convincingly argues that people of Prince's generation were uniquely situated between hope and disappointment due to their historical proximity to the civil rights movements of the 1960s and the subsequent economic, social, and political regressions of the 1970s. "Late boomers," he writes, "are aware of the dream of the 1960s but they are also shaped by the failures and death of that dream…" (67). The 1960s were not entirely a dream for the Black American working class, of course, but by 1970, when Prince was twelve, there were reasons for optimism. For instance, one study published in 2000 shows that between 1960 and 1970, the percentage of Black Americans in the working class jumped from 58 percent to 71.3 percent, a slightly larger increase than during the economic boom of World War II and the immediate postwar America (Horton et al 131). This increase reflected a decline in Black poverty due to various factors, including the gains of the Civil Rights Movement and the Johnson administration's Great Society program. Although the percentage of Black Americans in the middle class increased only by 1.4 percent in the 1960s, there was between 1970 and 1980 a 4 percent increase in the Black middle class, raising it to a total of 8.9 percent (Horton et al 131). Prince couldn't have been aware of these statistics, of course, but they do provide a basis for the cultural discourse within the Black working class that integration and the pursuit of the American dream seemed to be working, albeit very slowly.

However, based on the career decisions he would soon make, we can surmise that Prince was definitely aware of the links between class, class mobility, and systemic racism due to his experiences in Minneapolis and his careful observation of the music industry. When Prince signed a three-album contract with Warner Brothers in June 1977, he resisted the notion that he would be only a "Black artist." Marylou Badeux, a Warner Brothers executive at the time, recalled that "Prince was very concerned about being labeled a Black artist or being segmented into the Black department. He said to us, 'I'm not an R&B artist. I'm not a rock 'n' roller. I'm an artist and I do a wide range of music. If I deliver you rock 'n' roll, don't come back to me and say I can't do it because I'm Black" (qtd. in Touré 102). One likely reason for Prince's stance was the effects this literalized double consciousness had on his father and his father's generation of musicians in Minneapolis: men and women whose professional success and longevity required them to bifurcate their artistry for white and Black audiences. In that 1976 interview with his high-school newspaper, an eighteen-year-old Prince is critical of living in Minneapolis: "I think it is very hard for a band to make it in this state, even if they're good. Mainly because there aren't any big record companies or studios in this state. I really feel that if we would have lived in Los Angeles or New York or some other big city, we would have gotten over by now" (Crawford). An example of how class is connected to place, this testimony also may be considered as a coded reference to the racialized obstacles Prince had already witnessed in Minneapolis. Prince's early mentor, Pepe Willie, has noted that it was exceedingly difficult for Black musicians to get recording time in local Minneapolis studios (McInnis 52). McInnis describes that during Prince's early career, the First Avenue club that Prince made famous in the 1984 film *Purple Rain* booked Black acts only one night a week, and only on weeknights at that. "Prince understood that he had to contour his work to be more palatable to this crowd," writes McInnis. "At the same time, this is an example of Prince buying into the artistic and economic limitations of playing black clubs even though they have just as much if not more history and tradition as First Avenue" (55). While this is undoubtedly true, Prince's intense ambitions and the working-class ideology of class mobility, especially the notion of doing better than one's parents, likely spurred him to gain entry into any and every club, the bigger the better.

By all accounts, Prince carefully studied the musicians he admired, especially Sly and the Family Stone and James Brown, and nearly everything else he heard on the radio and on vinyl. One of Prince's his earliest managers, Owen Husney, and others have described Minneapolis as devoid of Black radio, with Husney claiming that Prince's experience was one of black records and white radio (qtd. in McInnis 60). This is not entirely true. KUXL was an AM station which exclusively featured R&B during the 1960s and 1970s. "For much of its history, disc jockeys at KUXL promoted R&B shows. In the late 1960s, they were responsible for bringing in some of the biggest acts to perform in Minneapolis and St. Paul, including Ike & Tina Turner, The Four Tops, Syl Johnson, Al Green, and others" (Gilbert et al 28). By 1974, when Prince was living in the basement-turned-practice space of Bernadette Anderson's home, he and his friends would also have been listening to Minneapolis station KQRS-FM, which played music by Black and white artists in a MOR format and a late-night freeform format (Thorne 17). Embedded in these historical details is a fascinating, complex debate about the class signifiers of Motown, often considered northern, middle-class, integrationist music, and the soul music typified by the Stax label, heard as southern, working-class, and less integrationist—a debate that is further complicated by the rise of funk and disco, both Black working class genres, and the ebb and flow of the crossover of Black music into so-called mainstream, i.e., white, radio and audiences. In his

book *The Death of Rhythm and Blues*, critic Nelson George asserts that the economic gains of the Black working class in the 1960s and early 1970s via integration induced a belief in the power of the crossover, which represented an ascension into the middle class; this, combined with corporate consolidation in the music industry, led to a "deadly feast-or-famine syndrome" for Black artists by the end of the 1970s (156). The most successful years for crossover music—defined by George as "the placement of number-one black hits on the Billboard pop chart"—were between 1967 and 1973, when, as George points out, independent labels were thriving (57). These were, of course, Prince's pre- and early adolescent years. However, by the time Prince had signed to Warner Brothers, the picture was changing considerably. As George details, Black crossover music declined and "white soul" artists began to dominate Black radio stations; the rise of the "urban radio" format in the late 1970s was a trend in which Black radio stations that played predominately Black artists did not identify as "black," primarily for the sake of advertising revenue (159-161). Thus, Prince perceived that if he had identified himself as Black artist, he would have risked placing himself outside of lucrative radio opportunities. As Touré notes in *I Would Die 4 U*, the record-label publicity departments which focused on Black artists were usually far-less funded and staffed than those catering to white audiences because the labels believed they would see less profit from Black audiences (102).

In other words, Prince's reasons for resisting the label of "Black artist" were not only pragmatic, and not only ideological; they were a combination of the two, and deeply intertwined with class ideology and imagination. Believing that upward mobility required integration into a middle class defined primarily by white standards, Prince did not seem compelled to reject or abandon the culture of the Black American working class—though many critics, including Nelson George, would accuse him of this. Rather, he seemed to believe, like many before him and after him, that some values of the Black working class were very similar to the mainstream/middle class, and those that weren't could travel. Martin Luther King, Jr.'s vision that a man might be judged by the content of his character—or the quality of his work—and not the complexion of his skin suited, in theory, both classes and class mobility itself. At the same time, Prince's do-it-yourself methods in the studio, about which Warner Brothers was initially skeptical, evinced not only working class values of dedication, manual skill, and the ingenuity we have already described, it was a more intense version of the self-determination embedded within the liberalist ethos of the Civil Rights movement. Prince wanted as much control as possible, especially artistic control, and thus sought from the beginning of his career to eliminate, for himself, at least, the alienating gap between the worker and the fruits of his labor. Additionally, if he could achieve crossover success by appealing to one diverse audience, the bifurcated appeals of his father's generation could be consolidated into one artistic vision—which, while serving the individualist ego of the artist, would also be more efficient and yield more artistic, if not economic, control.

True to his promise, Prince's debut album, *For You*, released in April 1978, reflected a variety of styles, from the contemporary R&B, funk, and disco styles of "Soft and Wet," "Just As Long As We're Together," and "My Love Is Forever" and the quiet storm balladry of "Baby" to the reggae inflections on "In Love," Latin rhythms of "Crazy You," the Joni Mitchell-inspired folk-jazz of "So Blue," and the bombastic funk-rock of the album's closer, "I'm Yours." The degree to which these styles appealed to Black working-class and middle-class audiences is debatable, of course. "Soft and Wet," the lead single from *For You*, barely charted on the

crossover Billboard Hot 100, but cracked the Top 20 on what was then called the Best Selling Soul Singles chart. (In 1982, it would be renamed as the "Black Singles" chart.) The album itself reached #21 on the Soul charts but only #163 on the Billboard 200 pop chart, which was at the time called the "Billboard Top LPs & Tape" chart. In any case, the performance of *For You* confirmed the Warner Brothers executives' opinion. "Prince was seen as a black artist," Howard Bloom, one of Prince's early managers, would later recall, and in the words of Prince biographer Alex Hahn, "[f]rom the start, the record industry had conceived of Prince as a young Stevie Wonder or Smokey Robinson, not a rare, Hendrix-like figure who could traverse boundaries" (32).

Prince, the follow-up album released in August 1979, a little more than a week after Michael Jackson's multiplatinum *Off the Wall*, was an even more focused R&B album. Split between dance tracks such as "I Wanna Be Your Lover," which reached #1 on the Soul Singles chart, and four ballads—including "When We're Dancing Close and Slow," the title of which may be a reference to a line in Joni Mitchell's song "Coyote"—Prince fit even more into the commercial milieu of Black radio at the time. However, Prince was continuing his influential practice of playing traditional R&B horn parts on the Oberheim synthesizer. "Why You Wanna Treat Me So Bad?" carefully weaves electric guitar throughout most of the song until a spectacular *tour de force* solo at the end, which gives way to heavy bass groove of "Sexy Dancer." And then there's "Bambi," a heavy metal rocker that tells the (highly problematic) story of a young heterosexual man wooing a lesbian. Such taboo subject matter, albeit grounded in masculine norms, was not destined to appeal to working class or middle class audiences, Black or white; instead, it is a signal, perhaps more than any other song on Prince's first two albums, that the young musician was addressing and seeking a younger audience with changing values.

I've gone into detail about Prince's first two albums to demonstrate that the narrative upon which later accusations of Prince abandoning his Black audience are based is more complex than it might seem. In short, we ought to ask, "Which Black audience?" Aesthetically, *For You* seems designed to appeal to a wide swath of listeners, and its slick, somewhat muted production has rolled off all the hard edges, signaling at the very least a middle-class aspiration. *Prince*, on the other hand, seems pointedly aimed at a younger, working class audience—one with money to spare. Likely this was the result of Prince's disappointment with *For You*'s sales coupled with the label's concern over the expenses he had racked up in the studio making the album; additionally, a disastrous set of live shows in January 1979, attended by Warner Brothers executives, placed doubt on Prince's live capabilities (Hahn 27-28). Thus, the pressures of commercial success pushed the artist toward leaner, catchier songcraft and production that was more obviously indebted to Black working-class soul, funk, and disco of the early 1970s. If we hear *Prince* more than *For You* as the fulfillment of popular music's reassuring and escapist functions which serve as relief for working-class listeners, that is partly because Prince urgently needed a hit or two.

1980 – 1986

That commercial impetus didn't preclude an aesthetic vision; neither would it solve the difficulties of negotiating between the Black working class and middle class. With the release of

Dirty Mind in 1980 and *Controversy* in 1981, however, Prince threw his weight behind an ethno-pluralistic American youth, which by definition may be considered working class since young people are more likely to work hourly-wage jobs. This was also a generation coming of age in the wake of the 1979 oil crisis and Three Mile Island disaster, living still under the threat of nuclear war while also entering the job market during the second recession in ten years. The difference in sound and form between *Prince* and *Dirty Mind* one year later is shocking, reflecting these events, perhaps, but quite influenced by punk's minimalism and aggressiveness along with elements of the new wave, synth-driven sound Prince would quickly help define. The forthright sexual and even transgressive lyrics in "When U Were Mine," "Head," and "Sister," matched on *Controversy* by songs like "Private Joy" and "Jack U Off," for example, opposed middle-class mores with working-class frankness if deeply contrasting with traditional morality in both classes, Black and white. Infamously appearing shirtless on the cover of *Dirty Mind* wearing nothing but a trench coat, scarf, and black underwear, Prince challenged conceptions of Black masculinity and heterosexuality in a way that discomfited people across race and class divides—except, perhaps, his young audiences.

Still, *Dirty Mind* and *Controversy* exude working-class-ness, if we can coin such a term. One of the most overlooked elements of his work at this time is how Prince joined working class resistance to the concerns of young people in much the same way punk sought to accomplish, albeit with a more overtly inclusive philosophy. For example, the chorus of "Sexuality" blatantly appropriates the language of labor unions for the purpose of sexual liberation: "Reproduction of a new breed/Leaders, stand up! Organize!" The song's extended outro finds Prince criticizing "tourists" who "look at life through a pocket camera." Tourism generally signifies middle-class leisure, but Prince quickly implies that his real concern is youth addicted to television who "only imitate their atmosphere," a warning that middle-class leisure—vacations, TV—might corrupt the working class, causing it to lose touch with the sensual world and their own bodies. In a similar vein, "Controversy" criticizes the media associated with the middle class. If "Party Up" subtly presages the defiant call for celebration in the shadow of nuclear threats he would repeat in "1999," "Ronnie, Talk to Russia" is far more overt in its call for dialogue and peace. There is, overall, a much stronger sense of status and political power on *Dirty Mind* and *Controversy*: a recognition of the low cultural status and powerlessness of the young and marginalized along with a dawning claim on a collective stake in present-day politics. Aside from "Controversy," the lyrics of the songs on these two albums make few references to Black culture, but the music is firmly grounded by tight funk rhythms, electric guitar, and bass guitar, signaling a more thorough alliance with the Black working class than either of his first two albums.

However, and not coincidentally, it is at this point in his career that Prince began lying in the press about his parents' ethnicity. In 1981, he told *NME* that his mother was Black and his father was the "Italian-Philipino leader of a mid-west pro jazz band" (Salewicz). That same year, he reported in *Rolling Stone* that his father was "half-black" and his mother Italian (Adler). This oral testimony scattered across numerous interviews gained sharp and widespread focus when Prince cast the Greek actor Olga Karlatos to play his mother in *Purple Rain* in 1984. The cultivated fiction that he was biracial would seem to have served a number of purposes. White supremacist fears of Black sexuality were often described in coded fashion as a resistance to miscegenation, and thus, by presenting himself as the child of intermarriage, Prince may have believed he would amplify the sexual allure and "threat" of his persona. However, in her

research of letters to the editors of Black American newspapers written primarily between 1925 – 1965, scholar Jan Doering finds that in the Black community, "while integrationists thought of intermarriage as a tool for overcoming the artificial barriers of race in American society, separatists regarded it as an impediment to racial emancipation" (560). Thus, as Doering states, "intermarriage" can be understood historically "as a metonym of integration" since it "takes racial integration to its logical conclusion…signif[ying] a degree of integration at which racial lines have become so permeable that even the most intimate of institutions—marriage—integrates" and also signifying "the bridging of previously disjointed communities, as marriage generates new kinship ties and biracial children connect racial groups" (561-62). Given the connection between integration and the working class-to-middle class trajectory, intermarriage can be understood as a middle class signifier. However, given the attending rhetoric of his music at this time, Prince may have hoped it would signal a more culturally bohemian appeal with white members of his desired audience, and some Black members, too, if at the expense of his parents, especially his mother.[6]

While Prince was thoroughly engaged in a dialogue with the Black middle class and Black working class, this element of bohemianism should be taken into account as a way in which Prince attempted to transcend them both. However, this reading requires more nuance, since class mobility assumes a different shape for many musicians. The British sociologist of music Simon Frith describes in his 1979 book *Sound Effects* how "to be a rock musician is, indeed, to be detached from a class background—if rock is a way out of the working class, a path to riches, it is also a way out of the middle class, a path to bohemian freedoms" (75). The bohemian class, signified later in Prince's career by the affectionate moniker, "Purple Hippie," identifies as being outside class, or more properly, as a combination of working-class income, middle-class education, and cosmopolitan, progressive politics. (It is this detachment one hears in the narrator's admonishments in "Sexuality.") Frith, however, distinguishes between two types of bohemianism: the familiar, romantic, individualistic bohemianism of literature and 1960s rock, and a more working-class bohemianism identified by the Marxist historian Eric Hobsbawm among prewar jazz musicians—a Black working class bohemianism that wasn't detached from working-class values like discipline, community, and the dignity of manual labor (75-76). If Prince leaned toward the former in his public personae, he clearly lived by the values of the latter, especially when we consider his early mastery of the recording studio as a form of highly technical manual labor. The dynamic between romantic bohemianism and working-class bohemianism demonstrates how, for musicians, the navigation of class divides requires, as opposed to class-blindness, an education in the dialogues of class and an ability to strategically signify various class signifiers, i.e., the ability to code switch, in different settings. Communication becomes self-consciously aestheticized. The implications for a Black musician

[6] The myth may have also played into the misguided idea that interracial coupling is most frequent among middle- and upper-class individuals, when in fact, between 1968 and 1986, according to one study, the sharp increase in interracial marriages between Black men and white women usually featured upward mobility on the part of the woman (Kalmijn 142). That same study notes that the increase in residential desegregation concurrent with and following the 1967 Loving v. Virginia Supreme Court ruling is another likely cause of increased intermarriage (141). Indeed, today a more common determiner, at least according to recent data, is living in cities (Balwit).

from the working class are particularly complex and potentially painful since whites are far more likely to have greater privilege to migrate from one class to another without being severed from their cultural roots—to say nothing of white privilege in terms of plain economic and educational advantage—and because the product necessary for the musician to attain riches and travel "the path to bohemian freedoms" has historically been exploited by primarily white-owned and operated record labels and corporations. As we have seen, though, Prince learned this code-switching fluency from his father, and the tradition of working Black musicians playing for Black and white audiences in high-class private parties and working-class clubs suggests that the adaptability and ingenuity of Black musicians of at least John L. Nelson's generation if not Prince's generation was tied, from the start, to the intersections of race and class. If bohemianism as an ideal meant class detachment, its achievement for many Black musicians has had everything to do with simply crafting a sustainable career.

The thrust of those final observations is simply this: Prince's upbringing and musical education in a Black working-class family and community directly, if subtly, influenced the politics that emerged in his 1980s work, what I have called elsewhere a vision of "queer democracy": a future situation in which socially-regulated identities can be abandoned by all people and in which cooperative social relations are founded on the recognition, inclusion, and empowerment of difference at the local level. Certainly this found its purest, strongest expression in Prince's fluxing of gender norms, challenging the centricity of heterosexual perspectives and the oppression of naming. This included, onstage and off, Prince's implied encouragement of heterosexual men to liberate themselves from the confines of sanctioned masculine expression, including Black masculinity. Queer democracy differs from identity politics in that it focuses on what I term "ethical heterogeneity," taken from the comics scholar Ramzi Fawaz's use of "heterogeneity," which he defines as "not merely the fact of many kinds of people but what those people do in relation to their differences," in his analysis of the comic book superheroes X-Men and particularly the team's Kenyan leader, Storm. Capitalism responds to heterogeneity by emphasizing competition; an ethical response emphasizes cooperation and collective purpose. There is indeed a superheroic quality to the bands Prince would lead in the 1980s. Through fashion and music videos, and especially in live performances, Prince and his bandmates not only called for liberation from the norms of gender, race, and sexual orientation, they performed that liberation onstage as a cohesive unit engaged with the audience for a common good.

Here, then, we come to the crux of Prince's integrationist journey, his transition from optimism and cooperation to a more radical utopianism that required a degree of opposition. Reflecting on the work of Richard Wright and the critic Arthur P. Davis, Houston A. Baker Jr.'s 1981 study of the "generational shifts" in Black American literary criticism finds that integrationist voices like Wright and Davis tended to believe that structural changes in American society would lead to integrationist and ultimately homogenously American art in which Black writers could equally participate, and thus they tended to look for landmark events such as *Brown v. Topeka Board of Education* for proof of that progress (180-81). Baker writes, "What seems implicit in Davis's critical formulations is a call for Afro-American writers *to speed the emergence* of such realities by offering genuine, artistic contributions to the kind of classless, raceless literature that he and other integrationist critics assume will carry the future" (181, emphasis mine). Prince would seem to fit that same mold, but partly due to the visceral power of his music, Prince did not just "speed the emergence," he embodied it, proclaiming that a utopian

future was already here. As C. Liegh McInnis notes, "…instead of focusing on a particular period in history or on any present movements of his time, [Prince] chose to focus on an ideal/fantasy/futuristic notion of a time when mankind had finally conquered its arbitrary walls of race, class, and gender" (60). As Baker notes, the Black Power Movement responded to the limited successes and terrible violence which defined and followed the Civil Rights Movement with an emphasis not on the future, seen by thinkers like Wright and Davis as nigh-inevitable, but on the present and the present-day structural inequalities. In this respect, then, Prince differed from both of the traditional poles of Black political resistance with which he had grown up.

Prince's utopian visions were culturally pluralist in so many explicit ways, but class was implicit, often unspoken except through the dialogic "traces of the past." This is because Prince worked within the highly commodified pop spectacle. Prince believed that rather than integrating his vision into the existing norms of that spectacle, he could integrate the spectacle into his vision. This, of course, is easier said than done, and criticisms that Prince had left his Black audiences behind stem in part from the very real, predictable ways in which capitalism absorbs any oppositional collective vision into individualist style and commodities. Perhaps popular music and its visions cannot help but succumb to this structure, especially when they are integrated into the star-making machinery of the American Wow. But if popular music has a subversive potential by making imagination and potential real in the minds of audiences—the potential alluded to above by Rose and Fisher—then Prince's utopian vision in the 1980s did have a minor class component by virtue of imagining a more radical democracy. José Esteban Muñoz, whose work on performance studies and queer theory has deeply informed my concept of queer democracy, writes in *Cruising Utopia*, "The here and now is simply not enough. Queerness should and could be about a desire for another way of being in both the world and time, a desire that resists mandates to accept that which is not enough" (96). Jason King, in a superb article eulogizing Prince for NPR in 2016, echoes this sentiment when he observes that "Prince's '80s 'Dance Music Sex Romance' mantra offered a thrilling counter-representation, and even a direct critique, to the foreclosure of liberal, ethical, spiritual and erotic possibility that Reaganism proffered" (King). For there to be class revolution of any kind, a class needs to know, or be reminded, that it's possible.

If the opening up of an integrated but radically different mainstream was what Prince imagined for the Black American working class in his crossover years, beginning with *1999*, released in 1982, that didn't mean he was unable or unwilling to draw from his own experiences and use the figures and language of that population—at least, as he conceived of it—in sometimes overt but usually subtle ways. The narrator in "Little Red Corvette," for instance, would be less likely to compare the exotic, headstrong sexuality of his paramour to a Corvette—or a "limousine," as he sings in the song's coda—if he was typically surrounded by such cars. The song strikes up a dialogue with countless R&B, rock 'n' roll, and blues songs which, for better or worse, metaphorize women as automobiles. "Lady Cab Driver" conflates the titular character's romantic love with maternal protection from the singer's existential alienation; in the song's aggressive coda, in which Prince simulates (not for the last time) sexual intercourse, Prince sings, "This is for the cab you have to drive for no money at all," and soon, "This one's for the rich/not all of 'em, just the greedy/ the ones that don't know how to give." On the *Purple Rain* follow-up *Around the World in a Day*, released in 1985, we find that class defined as wealth, status, and power dominate what are arguably the album's three best songs. "America"

returns us to the anxiety of "1999" and "Lady Cab Driver," but Prince contrasts "Aristocrats/on a mountain climb/making money and losing time" with a—"Little sister making minimum wage/ Living in a one-room jungle monkey cage/ Can't get over, she's almost dead/ She may not be in the black/ But she's happy she ain't in the red/." The last line, given the song's earlier warning about communism, infers a double meaning, voicing what I describe above as the "making do" approach in which personal integrity supersedes ambition; here it also surpasses the perceived limitations of communism. In "Pop Life," the narrator occupies the detached bohemian position, critiquing the various ways both working-class and middle-class people pin their hopes on spectacular success, that "million dollar check in someone else's box," waste their wealth on drugs, and refuse to educate themselves. While Prince often voiced a suspicion of money (which I would argue can be read from both working-class and middle-class perspectives), "Pop Life" is Prince's first pointed critique of the mediated spectacle of the American Wow. In context, the line "Don't you know straight hair ain't got no curl" is a metaphor for embracing life's unexpected twists and turns, but it's clearly an allusion to Black hairstyles and can be read as a criticism of the emerging Black middle class. Finally, the massive hit "Raspberry Beret" begins as nothing less than a working-class narrative: "I was working part-time in a five-and-dime/ My boss was Mr. McGee/ He told me several times that he didn't like my kind/ 'Cause I was a bit too leisurely/ Seems that I was busy doing something close to nothing/ But different than the day before/ That's when I saw her—ooh, I saw her!/ She walked in through the out door, out door/." While anyone who's worked retail understands the mind-numbing repetitiveness and boredom about which Prince sings, the detail that "Mr. McGee" doesn't like the singer's "kind" because he's "a bit too leisurely" evokes the stereotype of the lazy Black worker. The singer responds, essentially, that the real problem is the job, which despite its different tasks is always the same.

No account of Prince's career in the 1980s is complete without a consideration of *Purple Rain*, but here I would like to focus on the film: a working-class narrative. Prince plays The Kid, a mirror of himself; his parents' marriage is broken, his father is abusive toward both him and his mother, but his ambition is strong. The middle-class elements or aspirations of Prince's actual upbringing are absent; no one in the film is seeking a college degree. Prince's house, his parents' clothes, the juxtaposition of urban Minneapolis and its pastoral outskirts, and the film's central theme of repeating the mistakes committed by one's father combine to form a decidedly working-class atmosphere. McInnis has shown that a great deal of the film's dialogue concerns songwriting, practice, performance—in other words, a musician's work. "A lot of people view *Purple Rain*, and they see a long music video," he states. "I see *Purple Rain*, and I tell people that three-fourths of the movie is about study. It's about craft. It's about people discussing what type of music are we going to play. Most of the arguments are at rehearsal…. [His work] said to me that, if you study and hone your craft, you can stand on your individualism and will have a base, but you must first work and be diligent about doing it" (2001). What's more, the action of the film occurs entirely within Minneapolis; there are no road trips to New York City, no touring, no television shows, none of the numerous tropes which appear in so many rock 'n' roll fictional and nonfictional films with a "making it" plot. The utopian vision and bohemian class detachment exist entirely at the First Avenue club, juxtaposed severely by Prince's home life; it is a dream limited by its environment. One could study the penultimate scene in which The Kid unveils "Purple Rain" for its class signifiers. He stands silent at the microphone. His father has

killed himself[7], leaving The Kid with a box of sheet music from his failed career. The camera alternates here between Prince and various crowd members, White and Black. One young White man looks like he's come from a Flock of Seagulls concert. A young Black man has permed hair and wears a marching band cap, while another chubby-cheeked young man has a modest Afro and wears a red suit and black bow tie, reminiscent of Black singing groups of the 1950s. No one looks rich, or even middle class, really. For all that it visualizes a pluralist utopia and the ethical heterogeneity of queer democracy, *Purple Rain* ultimately emphasizes the moral struggles created by artistic ambitions, economic limitations, and familial traditions arising from the context of the Black working class. And yet, The Kid's antagonists, Morris Day and his band The Time, with their thick blend of funk, R&B, and the Minneapolis Sound, also represent the Black working class. With his coif and fur coat, Day echoes the Blaxploitation version of "the pimp," and thus, the illicit underside of capitalism. Tellingly, The Time offer simpler pleasures and crowd-pleasers, and The Kid's ultimate triumph over the band signifies the victory of art over commerce.

The reasons why Prince's music and the film *Purple Rain* were not considered to be reflective of or speaking for the Black working class in the United States are numerous: a general inarticulacy about class in popular culture, particularly in a white music press unable to describe Black working class music without devolving into to romanticized racism; that same popular press' adulation of Bruce Springsteen and *Born in the U.S.*A's clear (though immediately misunderstood and co-opted by Reagan) working-class evocations, despite the fact that Springsteen knowingly and lovingly drew upon 1950s and 1960s R&B and soul music; and the massive spectacle of Prince's stardom and the milieu of the corporate pop spectacle at the time, which made no room for Prince's frankly D.I.Y. recording methods and philosophy.[8] But this disregard may also have had something to do with the music itself. Between 1980 and 1982, on *Dirty Mind*, *Controversy*, and *1999*, Prince undoubtedly drew from punk and new wave styles; it was harsh and anxious music, minimalist at times, and marked by electric guitar, drum machines, and synthesizers. Prince's use of the latter two in particular, epitomized by the Linn M-1 drum machine and the Oberheim synthesizer, signaled more of a modernist than postmodernist attitude, the end of a previous "ongoing historical conversation" and the beginning of a new one: a utopian, avant-garde project. As such, his work implied a break with musical tradition. Working-class music is generally identified by its maintenance of traditions. Thus, critics seemed unable to bridge the divide between tradition and utopianism in Prince's music in regards to the working class.

Inarguably, though, this music represented present-day working class youth in much the same way punk did. The highly repetitive rhythmic structures, so repetitive that they might be called "droning," can be heard as a replication of not only industrial noise but also highly

[7] While the end of *Purple Rain* leaves room to indicate that The Kid's father may survive the suicide attempt, in the film's sequel, *Graffiti Bridge*, The Kid's father has died from the attempt in *Purple Rain*.

[8] In my efforts to focus on Prince's music, I have not discussed his use of home studios beginning promptly after the release of *For You* which developed, of course, into Paisley Park Studios. This artistically and economically self-sufficient methodology clashed with corporate standard practices, naturally, and remains an important avenue for further research and inquiry.

regimented work—the complaint in "Raspberry Beret." Indeed, we should recognize that tedious reiteration is not limited to industrial, blue-collar, manual labor; numerous wage-earning jobs match low pay with repetitive acts. Intriguingly, Tricia Rose defends rap in *Black Noise* by critiquing the way various cultural theorists, such as Theodor Adorno and Jacques Attali, characterized repetition as "a manifestation of mass culture," i.e., opposed to the avant-garde, and thus "equated [sonic, formal repetition] with industrial standardization and…a move toward a single totalitarian code" (71). Rose counters that, "[w]orking inside the commodity market and with industrial technology, rap music uses rhythmic forces that are informed by mass reproduction technology, but it uses it in ways that affirm black cultural priorities that sometimes work against market forces" (72). Might we not apply this to Prince and his albums between 1980 and 1982 to "America," which in its full form is more than ten minutes long? As Prince developed the "Minneapolis Sound" with the band that would become the Revolution, he added more and more pop elements, largely a result of the influence of guitarist Wendy Melvoin and keyboardist Lisa Coleman. The rhythmic base, however, remained very consistent through *1999* and *Purple Rain*, and while *Around the World in a Day* and 1986's *Parade* experimented heavily with various styles, in concert this steady propulsion served as the vital backbone for extended jams. In short, there's a case to be made that arguably the fundamental aspect of Prince's sound "use[d] rhythmic forces…informed by mass reproduction technology"—the drum machine, playing droning rhythms—in cooperation with and opposition to mass culture and capital, which to my mind aptly signifies the contemporary working class experience in which mass media and capitalism are inescapable.

Dialogic criticism would seem prime to uncover the hidden or subterranean historical aspects of even the most popular of popular music. If Prince's music can be heard as giving voice to a contemporary working-class experience, at the very least it also bore the historical traces of Black American labor and music dating back to World War II due, in fact, to its integration of cultures and sounds. In "Against the Wind," Lipsitz argues that 1940s wartime "industrial labor created the preconditions for rock and roll" due to the vast migration of rural whites and Blacks to urban centers where "workers heard music previously restricted to limited audiences" (116-17).[9] This was crossover music in a different sense, more egalitarian in its aesthetic exchange even as racial inequality plagued its social context. Nonetheless, these workers-turned-musicians, driven by the "desire to leave behind the alienations and indignities of work," writes Lipsitz, "…represented a synthesis of historical traditions that had previously been kept apart. Rather than accept the existing alignments within popular culture, they sought recognition as part of something new—something infinitely more democratic and pluralistic than existing popular music" (118). The invention of rock 'n' roll, in other words, was the result of a social and musicological integration that created a new situation. Whether he intended to or not, Prince was engaged in a dialogue with this history, albeit within an already existing, highly commercialized pop environment, and largely on his own. That formula may explain not only the subtle nostalgia one hears in *Purple Rain*, which is different from the oft-cited Sixties nostalgia of *Around the World in a Day*; it may also explain why Prince's music was so thrilling at this time: he seemed to be taking the weight of history on his shoulders. But at the same time,

[9] Not for the last time, I'll remind readers that Prince had a personal connection to this history given that both of his parents migrated from Louisiana to Minneapolis.

compared to the ideals and the future situation sought by the musicians of the postwar era, Prince's vision of queer democracy was a very different pluralism indeed.

1987 – 1989

Naturally, we might wonder how the Black American working class responded to Prince's utopian vision. The common narrative is that *1999* and especially *Purple Rain* began to drive Prince further from his base of Black listeners, but based on chart performance, this doesn't seem accurate. After *Dirty Mind* and *Controversy* each performed better on the R&B charts than on the so-called "mainstream" charts, Prince's breakthrough indeed came with *1999*, which peaked at #9 on the Billboard 200 chart. However, this did not come at the expense of Black radio. In fact, the single of "1999" charted higher on the renamed Black Singles chart than it did on the Billboard Hot 100. The album also reached #4 on the US Top R&B album chart. When *Purple Rain* was released in 1984, both "When Doves Cry" and "Let's Go Crazy"—quite different songs, the former dance-oriented and the latter a rock rave-up—reached #1 on both the R&B chart and Billboard Hot 100.

This trend continued with "Raspberry Beret" and "Pop Life," the first two singles from *Around the World in a Day*. The former hit #2 on the Billboard Hot 100 pop chart and #4 on the R&B chart, while the latter reached #7 and #8 respectively. It is only after "Kiss," from *Parade*, reached #1 on both the Billboard Hot 100 pop chart and the R&B charts that we can identify something of a decline in the performance of Prince's singles. Still, the single "Mountains" reached #15 on the R&B chart, seven positions higher than its peak on the Hot 100. The next single, "Anotherloverholenyohead," only reached #63 on the Hot 100, but hit #18 on the R&B chart. In terms of album sales, there was indeed a stark drop-off from the multiplatinum success of *Purple Rain*, but *Around the World in a Day* still reached #4 on the Billboard R&B album chart and *Parade* reached #2.[10]

These successes should inspire us to consider whether the discourse about Prince's fidelity to Black audiences was the product of cultural discourse more than it was a reality in terms of sales. The schism between the two derives, in part, from the political symbolism of "crossover" music in the MTV era. In a 1985 feature article about Prince in *Ebony*, there is a hint of warning in the words of John McClain, A&M Records Director of Black Music, when he reminds the reader that "[Prince's] success is predicated on Black radio. He had solidified his urban (Black) base before going [to] urban pop radio" (Norment 166). McClain also advises

[10] I'm aware that the peak position of singles (and albums) is perhaps not the best indicator of a musical work's commercial success. However, given that the singles charts have historically been subdivided along racialized lines, Black radio airplay may signal the degree to which the works were perceived and embraced by the Black community. This is especially useful for addressing the attempts by some folks (Black and White) to divorce Prince from the Black community by asserting that his being on the Black charts was more an indicator of his skin (perceived blackness) than of Black listeners actually purchasing his records. Certainly we cannot quantify the percentage of album sales by these listeners, but in the 1980s, radio airplay was arguably a reliable indicator. I'm indebted to C. Liegh McInnis for suggesting this clarification.

younger artists to "establish themselves on urban Black radio before trying to cross over to pop" (166). This statement casts Black radio as a testing ground of sorts, but does not entail the abandonment of Black audiences, in theory. However, the implication is that "real" success was defined by the tastes of white listeners. "Crossover" music initially meant, as Nelson George describes it, "the sale of black hits to whites" by choosing an album's debut single based on whether or not it had perceived interracial appeal, establishing and cultivating it on Black radio, and finally introducing the successful songs to white stations (150). However, MTV and music videos, along with a rapidly changing music industry predicated on blockbuster albums, meant that this process was outdated by 1984. The political import of crossover music, however, was not. Here, the signifying capacities of "intermarriage" provide a useful lesson. If, as Doering states, "more than simply naming a dyadic relationship, intermarriage constitutes a political symbol" (559), which means that "intermarriage [is] a metonym for integration" (561), then certainly "crossover music" may also be understood as a political metonym for integration. One might object by saying that a marriage, personal and specific between two people, does not entail the one-direction transfer of social power often seen in crossover music by its detractors. But Doering's research shows that, historically, opponents of interracial marriage perceived exactly that: a negative transaction of social power, including real capital and cultural status, and ultimately, a negative political impact.[11]

Despite Prince's intentions, it became clear after *Purple Rain* that some listeners and critics felt Prince had put too much distance between himself and his Black audience. In 1985, after shooting the well-known video for one of his most politically-charged songs to date, "America," the third single from *Around the World in a Day*, he was asked during an interview conducted by MTV about abandoning his Black audience:

> Some people have criticized you for selling out to the white rock audience with Purple Rain, and leaving your black listeners behind. How do you respond to that?
>
> Oh, come on, come on! Cufflinks like this cost money. Okay, let's be frank. Can we be frank? If we can't be nothing else, we might as well be frank. Seriously, I was brought up in a black-and-white world and, yes, black and white, night and day, rich and poor, black and white. I listened to all kinds of music when I was young, and when I was younger, I always said that one day I was gonna play all kinds of music and not be judged for the color of my skin but the quality of my work, and hopefully that will continue. I think there are a lot of people out there that understand this, 'cause they support me and my habits, and I support them and theirs. (Shore)

Three things captivate here. The first is the essentialist notion that rock is for white people and not Black people. Secondly, "selling out" implies an abandonment of Prince's authentic self and capitalization upon his ethnic roots, and Prince replies by not only making a joke about his cufflinks, but he affects an exaggerated (and very Morris Day-like) effeminate tone of voice, a complicated signifying on that very notion of authenticity. The third observation is that Prince

[11] See Table 2 in Doering, p. 566. Politics and class were not the only reasons for opposition to intermarriage, of course, but class, in particular, has historically been a somewhat overlooked motivation.

quotes and slightly alters Martin Luther King's famous declaration in his 1963 "I Have a Dream" speech. This demonstrates how Prince's beliefs about music and politics and race are fused while also giving credence to the generational argument Touré makes in *I Would Die 4 U*, but it also explicates the foundational working-class belief that it is one's actions by which one should be judged. It would seem that Prince aspired to show that what he perceived as local Black working-class traits could translate, and should translate, into any culture; there was an embedded moral and ethical imperative in his performances which celebrated his Minneapolis-born principles, and he believed that these principles could, in effect, redeem the corrupt capitalist system as much as they could continue to lift up the Black working class.

The 1986 album *Parade* and especially its connected film *Under the Cherry Moon* seemed to cement the notion that Prince had drifted from his Black audiences, which may have been a reaction to Prince's most overtly gender-queer persona to date, Christopher Tracy, as much at the film's wealthy, cosmopolitan, Francophone setting. In a review of *Sign 'O' the Times* the following year, Greg Tate describes the film as a "fete of self-hate" in which "his prissiness produces a dark-skinned black woman as his idea of horror incarnate. Vernon Reid saw *Cherry Moon* in Brooklyn with a theatre full of gaga black teenage women: "It was like watching Prince tell them, 'Y'all ain't shit to me.' I say, string him up" (Tate 81). In *The Death of Rhythm and Blues*, published in 1988, Nelson George echoed Reid's sentiment, arguing that Prince's use of "mulatto and white leading ladies" in his videos and films—including The Kid's white mother in *Purple Rain*—"seem[s] to reinforce the stereotypic idea that dark-skinned black women are not as attractive as their lighter sisters" (174). George also finds fault with Prince's androgynous presentation. Describing Michael Jackson as "an alarmingly un-black, unmasculine figure" who is "the most popular black man in America," George adds that "Prince is similarly troublesome," although his "more irksome trait" is that "he aid[s] those who [see] blackness as a hindrance in the commercial marketplace by running from it" (174). Although later in *The Death of Rhythm and Blues*, the author commends Jackson and Prince for their music's connections to history and their artistic and business sovereignty, he still takes a dig at their "whims," which bears the implication of femininity (195-96). In a 1991 *SPIN* feature, Scott Poulson-Bryant revisits 1986 as he describes how Prince fell off the map, alluding to Run-DMC's massive hit album and a similar heteronormative masculinity: "Questions asked, 'Have you heard the new Prince album?' 'Nah, but *Raising Hell* is dope. That shit is real.' Nubian princes strutting their stuff, out of the ghetto and into many other neighborhoods. This is the new black music power. No androgyny, all masculine brawn." These critiques obviously employ essentialist definitions of Black masculinity, but they also deploy these definitions in response to middle-class and upper-class signifiers and in support of Black working-class people.

This narrative continued despite 1987's *Sign 'O' the Times*, Prince's new, primarily Black band (which included the supremely talented Mexican/French Creole/African-American percussionist and more-than-a-protégé Sheila E. on the drums), and the subsequent concert film. It is likely a coincidence that the day after announcing the dissolution of the Revolution, Prince recorded the *Sign 'O' the Times* track "Housequake," but the album does signal a major departure from the cold, new wave sounds of Prince's famous backing band. The album is arguably funkier, and certainly more ambitious and more complex, than its predecessor *Parade*. Tate heaps praise on the *Sign 'O' the Times*, finding it "*too* black" and "so black it spurs sexistential debates between the brothers and sisters," largely because it "gives us pure pleasure

again" but also, as Tate implies, because it makes identifiable connections to Black artists of the 1960s and 1970s (81). The title track and "The Cross" make the most explicit connections to the Black working class, but such connections abound in the album's sonic polyglotism as Prince moves from the ripped funk-blues of "Sign 'O' the Times" to the grandeur of the soul ballad "Adore." In the concert film, blackness is even more so in dialogue with itself, from the drumline entrance and slow pan across the band's faces to the prominence of Boni Boyer's gospel-style vocals, the cover of Charlie Parker's "Now's the Time," and the prominence of the city set, a red light district via "Uptown." For the first time, Prince was speaking less to the future of the Black working class than its present, though it was certainly a dramatized "now" with Prince's own stamp put on it. In stark contrast to most of *Parade* and *Under the Cherry Moon*, Prince seemed to have brought his vision of the Black American working class into his increasingly globalized cosmopolitanism, the culmination of his utopian vision but performed in a way that put blackness front and center.

But the perception seemed otherwise, due (at least in part) to historical events beyond Prince's control. The Reagan Administration was indeed hard at work foreclosing on possibilities for the Black American working class, as Jason King would write many years later. In her recent book *White Rage*, Carol Anderson concisely details how Reagan and his cronies "rolled back" the gains of the Civil Rights era for Black Americans in nearly every regard, including federal funding for cities, student loans, K-12 nutrition programs, exacerbating an already marked downturn. "From the 1960s to the 1970s, the black unemployment rate had declined, and the gap between black and white unemployment rates had actually narrowed," Anderson writes. "By the time Reagan's policies had taken effect, however, not only had black unemployment increased, but also the unemployment gap between black and whites had widened to unprecedented levels. During the early 1980s, the overall black unemployment rate stood at 15.5 percent…while unemployment among African American youth was a staggering 45.7 percent" (121). The continued deindustrialization of the American economy that began in the 1970s was met by Reaganite "trickle-down economics" and attacks on the social safety net. Then there was the Reagan era CIA's introduction of crack into the Los Angeles metro area, which inspired gang violence and only exacerbated a nascent AIDS crisis—a connection Prince makes, in fact, in "Sign 'O' the Times." Mark Anthony Neal has noted that, by this point in time, "[u]nder the banner of 'urban renewal,' the black working class and working poor were marginalized and isolated from the engines of the postindustrial city…and instead exposed to intense poverty and rampant unemployment, which subsequently challenged traditional desires to maintain community" (130).

Hip-hop culture and rap are often described as an explicit response to the economic stagnation and downturn of the 1970s and 1980s, and as numerous critics and scholars have shown, this response emerged from Black working-class, working poor, and poor artists. In her classic 1993 text *Black Noise*, Tricia Rose writes, "Situated at the 'crossroads of lack and desire,' hip hop emerges from the deindustrialization meltdown where social alienation, prophetic imagination, and yearning intersect" (21). In a 1987 interview, Cornel West observed, "The music of Grandmaster Flash and the Furious Five, Kurtis Blow, and Sugar Hill Gang has to take on a deeply political character because…they are in the reality that the black underclass cannot not know—the brutal side of American capital, the brutal side of American racism, the brutal side of sexism against black women" (West 288). But as Mark Anthony Neal convincingly

argues in "Postindustrial Soul: Black Popular Music at the Crossroads," rap also came to symbolize the disconnect between the Black middle class and so-called "underclass." What's more, "[b]y the late 1970s, the commodification of the black poor or underclass as human spectacle became a standard trope of mass culture," Neal writes, "parlaying a clear sense of social difference from 'blackness' for many mainstream consumers, including an emerging black middle class" (131). It is worth noting that *The Cosby Show*, featuring a fictitious version of Cosby (in more ways than one) and his upper-middle-class family in Brooklyn, debuted in the fall of 1984 and was an instant ratings hit. Images of Black working-class families, and Black working-class women, were rare in mass media, which was controlled overwhelmingly by whites. If such images from the previous decade lingered in the "collective history" and collective memory, they had to compete with the dominant futurist narrative being written by Wall Street's materialism, the technology's sector's own brand of utopianism, and the Reagan Administration's attempts to align neoliberal politics with conservative and racially exclusive visions of the American past-future, e.g., the "shining city on a hill." As rap emerged from the urban Black working class and so-called underclass in the mid-late 1980s, its class complexities were sandpapered into an expression of ghetto life, i.e., the life of Black poverty. This simplification was also deeply masculinized, even by Black critics such as Nelson George, whom Rose rightfully takes to task in *Black Noise* for defining rap by excluding female rappers and for failing to "draw…critical attention toward how black male heterosexuality is socially-constructed" (152). Thus, as we've already seen, as Prince was assuming a dominant position in the mainstream, his fluxing of gender norms ran headlong into a crisis within Black communities, a crisis which had gendered class implications and class-based gender implications.

In *Black Noise*, Rose affirms that "popular practices enter into and revise dialogues already in progress" (148). Rap, then, was a primary site for the dialogue about this situation; it was both journalistic (as Chuck D would famously claim) and performative (a quality missed by many critics). This dialogue was happening on many levels between many social groups. Rap definitely spoke against the oppression of urban Black individuals and communities by white socioeconomic power structures, but as Mark Anthony Neal asserts, "the emergence of hip-hop…was representative of a concerted effort by young urban blacks to use mass-culture to facilitate communal discourse across a fractured and dislocated national community" (136). But as Greg Tate has argued, "Up until Public Enemy, hip hop's intent was never to shock the world but to sell the market on its novelty and profitability" (qtd. in Baldwin 231). This tension between communal discourse, artistic innovation, and consumeristic appeal was ultimately productive in facilitating, as well, a dialogue between the Black working class and so-called underclass and the Black middle class, a confrontation which had generational impetus. As Davarian L. Baldwin argues, Afrocentric nationalist rappers and groups—KRS One, De La Soul, the Native Tongues collective which included De La Soul and Queen Latifah, and Public Enemy—"became a cipher to understand blackness in arenas of upward mobility and hip-hop's national growth" (233). Framed, to some extent, as "middle class," nation-conscious rap was nonetheless deeply innovative and commercially successful. Baldwin and others then argue that G-funk "gangsta rap" "attempted to speak back to the middle-class-oriented position of nation-conscious rap" and by the early 1990s, especially after the release of Dr. Dre's *The Chronic*, "critiqued nation-conscious rap's politically correct disciplining of black bodies" from the West

Coast (235). This dialogue also involved age demographics: a post-Civil rights generation looking at the efforts of the previous generation and finding little to call a "victory."[12]

Prince famously seemed to hold rap in contempt in the mid-to-late 1980s, though it's possible this was exaggerated in the media and cultivated by the history of his infamous, initially-unreleased 1987 album, *The Black Album*, and one of its songs, "Dead On It." Recorded between October 1986 and March 1987 but pulled at the last minute by Prince and kept from a December 1987 release, *The Black Album* quickly became, according to many sources, the most sought-after bootleg since the late 1960s. Prince helped this along, no doubt, by including, in the video for his subsequent album *Lovesexy*'s lead single "Alphabet St." the message, "Don't buy "*The Black Album*" – I'm sorry." Having shelved *The Black Album*, Prince immediately recorded *Lovesexy* between December 1987 and January 1988, keeping only one song from the unreleased album, "When 2 R In Love." *Lovesexy* has a similar kinetic musicality as its forebear, but the harsher tones, aggressive funk, and sexual lyrics have been replaced with a lighter touch, a more pop-oriented funk with jazz overtones, and uplifting religious lyrics. In any case, the history of these two albums may have overemphasized Prince's critique of rap. "Dead On It" may be genuine but also feels competitive and playful. Mimicking a rapper with a stiff delivery, Prince first describes scanning the radio for some music and hearing "a silly rapper talking silly shit instead." That he's hearing rap on the radio suggests the problem is, in part, that rap has begun to crossover into the mainstream—Prince's territory. Most likely Prince wouldn't have recorded "Dead On It," sometime in March 1987, if rap was not becoming popular. Run-DMC had a high mainstream profile by 1985, and in 1986 the group's album *Raising Hell*, fueled by its massive hit, "Walk This Way," a cover of and collaboration with the white rock band Aerosmith, went multiplatinum. The next verse of "Dead On It" boasts that while "Negroes from Brooklyn play the bass pretty good/But the ones from Minneapolis play it like it oughta should." The use of the term "Negroes" can be read a dis, a claim that these Black musicians are behind the times, but "the ones" suggests the same term applies to Minneapolis musicians but that they simply know how to play the bass guitar authentically. This is the verse where the listener might suspect that Prince is portraying someone older than himself, a Black man from a previous generation who's reacting to rap…such as his father. The third verse is a bit of a breakdown, with Prince emphatically criticizing the inability of rappers to sing, an unmistakable dis. Is it possible that Prince is playing the role of an older generation throughout the song?[13] After all, "Dead On It" *is* a rap song, filled with (in subsequent verses) signifying, boasts, a little bit of playing the dozens. Prince critiques rap from within, showing that he can perform equally well if not better than rap artists but they cannot achieve, musically, what he can. Still, by performing rap to criticize rap, Prince signals some degree of kinship with the Black working class from which rap was rising.

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[12] See Neal, pp. 135-36, and Baldwin, among many others.

[13] Years earlier, Prince had a habit of recording scratch vocals for The Time "in a raspy voice that sounded like an old man. 'That was him imitating his dad and his father's generation—barber shop guys,' noted engineer Susan Rogers" (Hahn 45). You can hear what is likely an example of this in the 1983 outtake "Cloreen Bacon Skin," a hilarious fifteen-minute improvisation featuring Prince on bass guitar and vocals and Morris Day on drums. The track was released in 1998 on the *Crystal Ball* box set.

Two other songs complicate things even further and lead me into further speculation about the reasons for Prince's initial disdain for rap (without, I hope, overstating the case) and their class implications. The first reason is centered around his well-established utopianism, spiritual beliefs, and hopefulness, both connected to his being a "late boomer" intent on continuing the project, as he saw it, of Civil Rights. Numerous critics, including Mark Anthony Neal, have noted that early rap was considered nihilistic, especially from a middle-class, intellectual, and political perspective. In that same 1987 interview, Cornel West argued that "black rap music is principally a class-specific form"—earlier he identified these classes as the "black underclass and poor working class"—"of the Afro-American spiritual-blues impulse that mutes, and often eliminates, the utopian dimension of this impulse. … Without a utopian dimension—without transcendence from or opposition to evil—there can be no struggle, no hope, no meaning" (West 482-83). Not only might this summarize Prince's position in the late 1980s, it describes precisely everything with which Prince's music struggled: the possibility of a better future that might transcend the limitations and sins of the present. This comes to bear on *The Black Album*'s "Bob George," a grisly satire of Black masculine jealousy and violence. Prince's voice is slowed to an unrecognizable bass register for his role as this unnamed man who suspects his lover is having an affair with "Bob George," a fictional manager of musicians, including Prince, "that skinny motherfucker with the high voice." The narrator kills his lover and barricades himself from the police. It is as nihilistic as any Prince song gets, and while it may be heard as a kind of satire, it is also not difficult to transpose the threatening masculine rage of the narrator onto the hypermasculine boasting of rap, which thus becomes a threat to Prince's ambiguous and flexible gender performativity.

Another reason for Prince's critique of rap is the value he placed on artistic originality and innovation. In the few interviews he gave in the 1980s, he frequently railed against the lack of both on the radio. In his 1986 interview with *Ebony*, he said:

> I think *Purple Rain* is the most avant-garde purple thing I've ever done. Just look at [the singles] "When Doves Cry" and "Let's Go Crazy." Most Black artists won't try a groove like that. If more would, we'd have more colorful radio stations. In the '60s, when everybody tried to be different, you had War and Santana, and Hendricks, and Sly, and James [Brown], and they were all uniquely different. Now, everyone just jumps on what they think are the hottest sounds (Norment 166).

In an interview the previous year with *Rolling Stone*, he said, "Today, people don't write songs; they're a lot of sounds, a lot of repetition. That happened when producers took over, and that's why there are no more [live] acts. There's no box office anymore. The producers took over, and now no one wants to see these bands" (Karlen). This, in particular, can be read against one of rap's dominant features: the repetitiveness in its musical structures. This returns us to Rose's defense of rap in *Black Noise* from typically white and modernist criticisms of repetition as emblematic of mass production and capitalist hegemony, but Prince's motives were arguably less political than romantic and individualist—and in some ways, a defense of the working-class work ethic. Theoretically, his claim that "producers have taken over" implies a kind of industrial reappropriation of the musician's originary expression. As an art form, rap has traditionally been grounded by DJs who perform a producer's function—not in the sense Prince means it, of course, but in the sense of fluently combining music made by other people. In a strange way, rap

then becomes, aesthetically, a managerial, bourgeoisie appropriation of the original worker(s)' work: the exploitation and alienation of the originary labor. This stance, which only makes any sense outside a social context, might seem to be contradicted by the numerous Revolution-era songs that droned on a beat (especially in the extended dance mixes) or by a song like "The Cross," the structure of which is built on repeating verses, the fourth line of each being a refrain. It's relevant, then, that in "Dead On It," after the first and second choruses, Prince mutters, "Shall we go back? Let's go" in a kind of nerdish voice, as if making fun of the looping repetition of rap songs' structures and foundational sound phrases.

The third song which signifies a connection to rap on *The Black Album* is "2 Nigs United 4 West Compton," the first instance Prince came close to including the word "nigger" in any of his would-be released songs at that time,[14] and it is not at all repetitive. This blistering funk instrumental, harsh and clamoring, punctuated occasionally by a group shouting the song's title, can be understood as a sonic narrative borne from Prince's imagined version of the predominately Black and Latino neighborhood in Los Angeles, across town from where Prince recorded the song at Sunset Studios on December 9, 1986. On the one hand, we might hear the song as another dis against hip-hop's supposed lack of originality, as the bulk of the track track seems almost designed to impress the listener with its technicality and bravado. Yet, there may be something meaningful to be gleaned from song's introduction, which is almost a completely different kind of song: a rhythm part more akin to the well-structured, though funky, up-on-the-one and down-on-the-two of "Housequake" overlaid by party chatter in which various types of Black folks with diverse and even confrontational personalities battle for position to be heard while merging into a gumbo of blackness. At this point, the instrumental kicks in, consisting of numerous solos, percussion breakdowns, clashing time signatures, and intricate call-and-response, all of it with a jazz vibe. Since both styles, funk and jazz, are authentically black, Prince may be signifyin' on and with sound to assert that the most authentic thing a Black person can be is multifaceted, which would expand notions of what is and who can be working class and middle class. Though distinctly different, both of these sounds can easily be heard at Black parties. Here, in other words, Prince is representing the fullness and flux of Black community and arguing, perhaps, that Black folks must stop accepting the outside pressure, integrationist or not, to conform to one type of blackness, a pressure which only works to divide and conquer the Black American community. Thus, the genius of Prince is that, while he is challenging hip hop's place in the canon of Black music, he is simultaneously making place for it. From a labor force position, it is this very type of understanding and uniting that will enable the labor force to overthrow the ruling class.[15]

Although *The Black Album* wouldn't be released until 1994, it was widely bootlegged, and on the basis of "Dead On It," "Bob George," and "2 Nigs United 4 West Compton," the narrative within fan and journalist circles was that Prince opposed rap. That Sheila E. delivered a rap drawn from poem "The Table and the Chair" by the nineteenth century poet Edward Lear—her performance is sometimes called the "transmississippi" rap—in "It's Gonna Be a Beautiful

[14] He does use the word in the improvisations of "Cloreen Bacon Skin," but there's no indication the informal jam was ever considered for release when it was originally recorded.
[15] The last half of this paragraph consists of edited feedback provided by C. Liegh McInnis used with his permission. Again, I'm deeply grateful for his input.

Night" on both the *Sign 'O' the Times* album and concert film, and that backup dancer Cat rapped on *Lovesexy*, apparently didn't change that perception. Perhaps this is because Prince, himself, wasn't doing the rapping, but it certainly didn't help that female rappers of color were consistently marginalized in the 1980s. Regardless, the story stuck, enough so that a 1991 feature in *The Sunday Times* described rap as "a genre [Prince] has previously disparaged" to which Prince seems to reply, "Everybody has the right to change their mind" (Sandall). This narrative in turn fed the broader one that Prince was drifting from his foundational Black working-class audience. While the rock music of *Purple Rain* was taken as an appeal to the white middle- and working-class—essentially a negative-positive, an increased fan base seen negatively—this charge directly implied a rejection of the Black working class, its concerns, and its imagination. But it also meant Prince was supposedly rejecting his childhood, his family, his community, and, in a sense, himself. This accusation was, in other words, a pure negation.

Regardless of the truth of the situation (which may be clearer in hindsight, or not) and the inevitable ways that situation was altered by contemporary media, rap in the late 1980s was having a vital conversation within and about the Black working class—and Prince was not in it. He may have considered himself to be championing Black working-class values and visions, but, if so, it was in a way that sought to integrate liberation within the capitalist system and frequently relied on what was perceived as a detached view of working-class life. His public statements in the 1980s contradicted what he surely knew about the complexities of the Black American musical tradition, the citation of previous songs, the incorporation of styles, Signifyin' as a cultural tradition, and the dialogic process of popular music in general. His music of this time, from a class perspective, is ambiguous and shifting, the work of an idealist testing the veracity of his ideals in the face of reality. I maintain this was on behalf of a Black working class imagination in America, its possibilities more so than its realities. This imagination faced, and was necessary because of, deeply rooted contradictions in American life. In the next decade, these contradictions would not vanish, but Prince would begin to address them, self-consciously, in a more explicit fashion and hone them, and, in doing so, perform a reckoning of sorts with the Black working class.

4. The Exodus Begins: 1990 – 1995

Graffiti Bridge

"Dear Dad, things didn't turn out quite like I wanted them to," Prince mutters at the beginning of his 1990 album *Graffiti Bridge*. "Sometimes I feel like I'm gonna explode." If we are tempted to read this as pure autobiography, we should remember that the album and film of the same name are sequels to *Purple Rain*. As Prince speaks, he is reprising the role of The Kid, whose father, portrayed by Clarence Williams III, committed suicide near the end of the 1984 film. Nonetheless, with his own father still very much alive, Prince performs a synergistic twining of fact and fiction, and in the face of "crossover" criticisms, re-mythologizes his Black working-class roots and reexamines his career. Nearly every song Prince sings on *Graffiti Bridge* had been recorded no more recently than the summer of 1987 or prior, the exceptions being "Thieves in the Temple" and "New Power Generation" (the second album track and its reprise). If the dialogic process of popular music entails historical revision—rebuttals, adjustments, (re)appropriations, retrievals—then the album and film *Graffiti Bridge* offer one example of how

that can occur when the subject in question is the author-artist himself. Here, Prince is in dialogue with his own history in an attempt to discover where he is and where he might go.

The admittedly threadbare plot of the film finds The Kid attempting to hold onto his successes, symbolized by his co-ownership of a club, Glam Slam, which is located in the Seven Corners neighborhood of Minneapolis (now frequently referenced as "Cedar-Riverside"). His ownership partner is his old nemesis, Morris Day, who along with The Time has become part-entrepreneur and part-gangster. Since Glam Slam has been bequeathed to The Kid and Morris by its previous, Black owner, the sunglasses-adorned Billy Sparks, who ran First Avenue in *Purple Rain*, the vague implication is that The Kid has changed the club's name from First Avenue to Glam Slam but is attempting to remain true to his ambitious, utopian vision while honoring Billy's wishes. Sparks, as an ancestor, symbolizes the dream of the Civil Rights generation—that their children get to the mountaintop, especially as it relates to economic prosperity and sovereignty. However, Morris' persona is willing to lie, steal, cheat, strong-arm, and even use the death of one of The Kid's friends to seize monopoly over the local club industry. The Civil Rights generation and its music are symbolized by the gospel legend Mavis Staples (as the matriarch Melody Cool) and funk pioneer George Clinton (who is just named George), each of whom own their own clubs at what is literally an intersection of history and culture. Morris, who owns the fourth club, Pandemonium, and owns stakes in Staples and Clinton's clubs as well, schemes to "bogart" the three musicians and buy their establishments outright and begins his campaign against Glam Slam with an unsuccessful bombing.

(Here I must deviate from the contemporaneous history to address the fact that The Time's 1990 comeback album *Pandemonium* includes a song called "Donald Trump (Black Version)." The song isn't included in the film, and Morris Day's character is not meant to be as villainous as Trump, but both symbolize the manner in which capitalism and the blind pursuit of the American Dream perverts the morals and sensibilities of the Black American working- and middle class. As such, "Donald Trump (Black Version)" is both fitting and prophetic as the 2016 Presidential election showed that there are many, including some Black Americans, who are more than willing to overlook the evil of the means to obtain the monetary rewards of the ends, even if it means "selling out" or causing harm to their own people.)

More than any other Prince album or film before it, *Graffiti Bridge* literally creates a multi-faceted dialogue about class, capitalism, history, and art. In 1990, watching "Morris" collect his share of the profit from all four clubs, it was easy to draw a line between gangsters from Hollywood's Golden Age, the pimps of Blaxploitation films in the 1970s, and the rising cultural figure of the West Coast gangsta. Given the way *Graffiti Bridge* unfolds, one can read him as a symbol of capitalism's corruption of the Black working class—even its values, such as a strong work ethic. Pressured by the city's government to pay $10,000, Morris berates his underling Cash, played by Jerome Benton, who wonders why his boss is so irate. Morris responds, "It ain't about mad, it's about discipline. Look, Cash, my family never had anything, and I intend to keep what I got." But keeping what he already has isn't what Morris truly desires. He wants it all. Even if his accrued complete ownership of the three other clubs would stabilize them and keep them Black-owned, the film implies that his absolute grip would suffocate artistic difference and end the dialogue. We never get a clear idea of what the music sounds like at either Clinton's House or Melody Cool; we get only a brief peek into the former with a clip of Clinton

performing, and we never enter Melody Cool, though Staples' club has glass-stained windows, the young protégé Tevin Campbell has a serious churched vibe to him, and, later in the film, the gospel group The Steeles emerge from the club to join Prince on "Still Would Stand All Time," so we can guess. Glam Slam represents Prince's utopian vision via "New Power Generation" and "Elephants and Flowers," which harkens to *Around the World in Day* and is performed to a near-empty room. But it's entirely this innovation, the risk of trying new things and not succeeding, that is threatened by Morris' possible takeover. So while it's tempting to understand Day's character as a symbol of ghetto economics, he also symbolizes capitalism's impulse toward standardization and sameness. These aren't necessarily mutually exclusive readings, and, together, they can be understood as Prince's vision of the corrupting influence of money—long a theme in his music—which produces class tensions that can only be resolved, as they are at the film's end, by tragedy, love, and God.

Ironically, while being one of his least popular/successful albums with Black audiences—although "Thieves in the Temple" and "Round and Round" each broke into the Top 20 of the R&B chart, the album sold poorly—*Graffiti Bridge* marks the beginning of Prince's explicit reembracing of musical genres associated with Black American audiences, a trend that would continue throughout the rest of his career. But much of this is the result of the album's inclusion of songs performed by The Time, Tevin Campbell, Staples, and Clinton. In the film, The Time's "Release It," a funk throwback with hip-hop vernacular, is the backdrop for Day's initial challenging of The Kid, foreshadowing the musical battle in the film's finale. Clinton appears on "We Can Funk," a re-recording of a legendary outtake dating to 1983. Staples anchors the end of the album and film with her straight-backed "Melody Cool" which precedes the key, epiphany-inducing gospel song "Still Would Stand All Time," which Prince had played during a *Lovesexy*-tour aftershow. These songs provide one kind of nostalgia. Some of Prince's contributions provide another, more personal kind of wistfulness: "Elephants and Flowers," which recalls his Revolution days, and the title ballad, which evokes "Purple Rain." At the same time, "Thieves in the Temple" and "Joy in Repetition" are startlingly innovative, the latter combining soul and jazz in a moody response to "The Question of U," the most straightforward (though quite enjoyable) blues song Prince had released since 1985's "Temptation."

The final contemporary touch is an important one: the influence of hip-hop culture, which can be felt throughout the album and film. But this is not just rap. In fact, the more predominant stylistic element is new jack swing, the popular late 1980s hybrid of hip-hop's programmed beats and R&B crooning, typified by artists such as Keith Sweat, Janet Jackson, Club Nouveau, and Bobby Brown, and invented by Teddy Riley and Bernard Belle. Moreover, scholars, such as musicologist Richard J. Ripani, author of *The New Blue Music: Changes in Rhythm & Blues, 1950–1999*, have observed that Janet Jackson's album *Control* (1986), produced by Jimmy "Jam" Harris and Terry Lewis, was one of the first successful records to influence the rise of new jack swing by creating a fusion of R&B, rap, funk, disco and synthesized percussion. Like Prince's music, new jack swing straddled the line between working class and middle class. (Bobby Brown rocks a turtleneck on the cover of his 1988 hit album, *Don't Be Cruel*.) Visible in the characters' fashion choices in *Graffiti Bridge* and audible in songs like "New Power Generation" and Campbell's hit "Round and Round," new jack swing would continue to influence Prince's artistry in the next couple years, and he certainly must have heard his own groundbreaking use of electronic drums sounds in it. Rap does not appear often in either the film

or the album, but it is provocatively placed at the end of each via TC Ellis' rap at the end of "New Power Generation, Pt. II" and the musical "battle" at the end of the film which echoes the tradition of rap battles. "New Power Generation" is compelling in that it introduces Prince's new band and explicitly critiques an older generation—"Your old fashioned music, your old ideas/We're sick and tired of you telling us what to do"—but it has an undeniably pop groove and feels completely unthreatening and not very realistic.

I hesitate to overemphasize the album and film's class consciousness, but, with *Graffiti Bridge*, Prince was for the first time in his career understanding himself more explicitly as a historical subject. Combined with the film's narrative, the album overtly questions the role Prince and his music might play at this historical moment amidst the fraught tensions between the past and the present contained in the popular music discourse of rap. By 1990, N.W.A. had exploded onto the national scene with *Straight Outta Compton*. Ice-T had released *The Iceberg/Freedom of Speech…Just Watch What You Say*. 1990 saw the release of numerous classic rap albums including N.W.A. member Ice Cube's debut, *AmeriKKKa's Most Wanted*, A Tribe Called Quest's *People's Instinctive Travels and the Paths of Rhythm*, and Public Enemy's *Fear of a Black Planet*. The latter leads with "Brothers Gonna Work It Out," a call for cooperation within the Black community and its diverse ideologies for the sake of, among other things, economic empowerment: "We gonna work it out one day/'Til we all get paid/The right way in full…." The song samples Prince's furious solo from "Let's Go Crazy," recontextualizing the original's ecstatic spiritualism in the face of Armageddon into a militant hopefulness. However, Public Enemy and other Black nationalist or politically-conscious hip hop groups were not the only ones with a mind for class critique. As Robin D. G. Kelley documents in his chapter on gangsta rap, or "G-funk," in *Race Rebels: Culture, Politics, and the Black Working Class*, artists like Ice-T and Ice Cube on the West Coast offered frequent analysis and critique about the intersections of class, capitalism, and race. Kelley writes, "In gangsta rap there is almost always a relationship between the conditions in which these characters live and the decisions they make. Some gangsta rappers—Ice Cube in particular—are especially brilliant at showing how, if I may paraphrase Marx, young urban black men make their own history but under circumstances of their own choosing" (194). Whereas earlier in his career Prince had been focused on making history by blurring, recontextualizing, and even mythologizing that history and the present, in the early 1990s he was becoming increasingly aware that the circumstances were disadvantageous even for a pop superstar. This forced him to find a way to reconcile his metaphysical understanding and approach to life with the specific physical (socio-political) concerns of Black Americans confronting the same ills of capitalism.

By 1990, it seemed that Prince had indeed changed his mind about rap. In a feature article for *Rolling Stone* that year, journalist Neal Karlen wrote, "What Prince listens to on his own time is a grab bag. He likes rap: he's recently signed rappers T.C. Ellis and Robin Power to record on his Paisley Park label but denies that he'll be producing songs for M.C. Hammer" (90). A little more than two decades later, Chuck D offered his own assessment that Prince had finally fully embraced the genre once he educated himself about rap: "…Eventually he was able to absorb what was going on, the great aspects, and leave the bones to the side and use it in his music" (qtd. in Thorne 272). The extent of that new understanding would become clearer on Prince's next album, *Diamonds and Pearls*, in 1991, but, as we shall see, the full extent took a while to develop. Still, when you listen to gangsta rap, particularly the period from roughly 1986-1991,

you hear voices deeply concerned with self-empowerment despite a crumbling social infrastructure exacerbated by drugs and crime. If Prince heard Ice-T say, "Capitalism says you must have an upper class, a middle class, and a lower class…. Now the only way to guarantee a lower class, is to keep y'all uneducated and as high as possible" (qtd. in Kelley 193), it's difficult to imagine that the composer of "Sign 'O' the Times," "The Cross," and "People Without" (an outtake performed at *Lovesexy* aftershows)—the man who said on *Lovesexy*, "The reason why my voice is so clear is there's no smack in your brain"—would not have nodded in agreement. In other words, if Prince got past the mainstream media depiction of gangsta rap, he would have heard a lot with which he could agree—and increasingly, he did.

Diamonds and Pearls **and ☥ (*Love Symbol*)**

There was, in other words, a reciprocity between what Prince heard in rap music and what he began to perceive about his own career: the attempted foreclosure of the Black American working-class imagination, which was really the betrayal of the promise and hope of integration. It was, in many ways, his own dream, the one he had tried to live. He never relinquished that dream—in fact, he seems to have been determined to surpass it—but the reality of the systematic foreclosure of that dream's future was something he couldn't ignore, partly because it affected him personally and professionally, albeit in ways far removed from the experiences of the working class. While *Graffiti Bridge* was a failure at the box office, the impact of that failure on Prince's evolving style must be left to speculation. We do have good reason to believe, however, that this is when Prince started to become dissatisfied with Warner Brothers. Randy Phillips, Prince's co-manager from 1990 – 1991, recalls that although "*Graffiti Bridge* wasn't well received," Prince "thought it was as great as *Purple Rain*." Whether Phillips means the album or film is unclear, but, in any case, he says, "In Prince's mind, everything was a hit. ... That's when he started fighting with the label" (Browne). Recounting that Prince bristled at the record company's slow pace in terms of promotion and distribution, which also entailed a lack of "direct contact with his audience," Phillips also recalls that Prince already wanted out of his contract with Warner Brothers: "He thought contracts were slavery and that people should trust each other in business. He demanded that Warners give him back his masters, but they couldn't do that—they couldn't take an asset like that and give it back to the artist. But he resented that" (Browne).

While Prince's soundtrack for Tim Burton's 1989 *Batman* film had sold very well, *Lovesexy* and *Graffiti Bridge* had not. Perhaps feeling pressure from Warner Brothers in addition to his own desire for success, Prince began crafting a new album. *Diamonds and Pearls* doubles down on new jack swing-styled R&B, includes four songs with feature raps by Tony M., backup singer Rosie Gaines, and Prince himself—"Daddy Pop," "Jughead," "Push," and "Live 4 Love"—and includes the swing tune "Strollin'," and the jazz-and-gospel inflected "Willing and Able" (which also includes a brief rap by Tony M.). If "Cream" was Prince's most overtly "pop" song in years, "Diamonds and Pearls" and "Money Don't Matter 2 Night" were deeply influenced by Philly Soul and R&B (Williams). "Insatiable" continued Prince's long tradition of quiet storm-style soul ballads. And then there's "Gett Off," a funky jam in which Prince seems to have taken cues from Public Enemy's dense stacking of instrumentation and samples. Lascivious, subtly threaded with Middle Eastern musical motifs, and citing (through original recording) a snippet of James Brown's "Mother Popcorn" (1969), "Gett Off" also features torrid

electric guitar work from Prince and a rap-style delivery of the lyrics. In short, *Diamonds and Pearls* was Prince's most overtly and consistently "black" album released to the public since at least *Sign 'O' the Times*, and arguably since 1979's *Prince*. And it did so while using musical styles which traditionally have signaled both the working- and middle-class experience for Black listeners. Indeed, if *Graffiti Bridge* sounds like a career retrospective, *Diamonds and Pearls* reviews nearly every genre that influenced Prince to date while also fusing them with more immediately contemporary stylistics.

"Diamonds and Pearls" is a compelling example of how a dialogic approach may reveal added layers of meaning in a song while also accounting for its internal contradictions. The song's lyrics find Prince telling a romantic partner that while he'd like to provide material riches, all "[he] can do is just offer" the listener "[his] love." Such rejections of wealth in favor of romantic and spiritual devotion and integrity were already common in Prince's oeuvre, but Prince takes it a step further by recognizing that these principles may brand him "a weaker man," articulating the connections between class and masculinity, as well as rap. The central metaphor of the song evokes but repudiates his 1982 song "International Lover" in which "diamonds and pearls" are alluring enough on their own. But metaphor and title also would have recalled for some older listeners, perhaps, the short-lived Bakersfield, California, doo wop group The Paragons' 1960 hit "Diamonds and Pearls." Musically, the two songs have little in common, but the Paragons' song expresses the same belief of love over money: "None of these jewels show me a thing/I want only…only…only/I want your love." Whether or not Prince knew of the song, he nonetheless drew yet one more line between music made by Black working-class Americans. This expression, however, is at first entirely undercut by the video for "Diamonds and Pearls," which is set in a luxurious mansion. Should we read this as a challenge to reject the splendor of what we see and understand what Prince feels in his heart? Or, is it simply the mandate of pop music at the time to which Prince had become accustomed? When, in the final third of the video, Prince and Rosie Gaines sing the last verse to children, the "you" to whom the song is addressed changes drastically, the song foretelling of a day when love will enlighten the children to the extent that "everything will shine so bright, it makes [them] colorblind." The weaving of materialism, love, and race certainly can be understood as a subtle explanation of how the fundamental competition of capitalism within a situation of lack fuels racism.

But the album does initiate Prince's overt criticisms of capitalism, too. Listeners may be forgiven for missing the dramatized critique of artists' managers at the end of "Jughead," one of the album's least popular tracks, but it's an important indication that Prince was already frustrated by the marriage of music and capitalism. Tony M. castigates an unnamed and very white-sounding manager for not only taking advantage of artists but continuing to profit long after the work has been done. When the rapper says, "And you laugh at my brother, Little Richard/When he says you ain't gave him nothing," an immediate connection is made to the history of Black artists being cheated of millions of dollars through all manners of contracts. "Money Don't Matter 2 Nite," a more popular song than "Jughead," is a little more ambiguous, but its tale of a naïve man suckered by "cool investments" is paralleled by a verse about "a child" sent to fight in the Gulf War for the sake of oil, a subject revisited in the album-closing "Live 4 Love." During the 1991 tour stop in Rio de Janeiro, an powerful moment happens after the normal outro solo of "Purple Rain": the song stops, and Prince says, "Rio, there's a war going on. I don't know what's up, but I think we'd all be better off living for love." At this point, he

sings the final verse of "Purple Rain," slowly, with minimal instruments behind him, revising the melody into a bluesy spiritual.

If we consider *Diamonds and Pearls* as a more clear-cut starting point of Prince's discontent and dawning class consciousness, we must reconcile those burgeoning political and economic beliefs with the album's various layers of success: it is built on Black music that was popular both in a contemporary and historical sense, and it was a commercial success with Black audiences. "Gett Off" (#6), "Insatiable" (#3), and "Diamonds and Pearls" (#1) all performed exceedingly well on the Hot R&B chart, and "Money Don't Matter 2 Night" (#14) performed admirably. Interestingly enough, "Cream" reached #1 on the Hot 100 but didn't crack the R&B chart, and while "Diamonds and Pearls" hit #3 on the Hot 100, "Gett Off" only reached #21 (an example of the limitations of relying on charts, by the way, since I remember "Gett Off" being the summer jam of 1991, but I digress). The album itself hit #1 on the R&B charts, #3 on the Billboard 200, and sold just shy of 3 million copies in the United States (Hahn 179), an indication that Prince could still appeal to a broad range of listeners. This must have surprised Prince's co-manager Randy Phillips, who recalled later, "I knew it was going to be hard to break that record. [Prince] didn't take that well" (Browne). No doubt Prince did work hard to promote the album with numerous music videos, an energetic quartet of performance on *The Arsenio Hall Show* (during which Prince did no interviews, but Hall was joined by Patti LaBelle), and his infamous, buttocks-exposing performance on the MTV Video Music Awards show. None of this effort, however, takes away from the success of Prince's artistic direction, and it would seem that his intensifying connection with Black audiences was encouraged, not satiated, by the success of the album.

On September 4, 1992, it was announced in the *Los Angeles Times* that Prince had signed a new, six-album recording and publishing contract with Warner Brothers reportedly worth $100 million, which, at the time, was considered to be the largest such contract in history (Phillips, "A King's Ransom for Prince"). The following day, another article in the *Los Angeles Times* attempted to clarify some of the details of the agreement, reporting that "insiders claim the total figure is based largely on projected revenue" and also that "some executives at the record label are not exactly ecstatic" (Phillips, "Just How Princely Is Prince's Deal?"). Given that Michael Jackson and Madonna had recently brokered deals for $40 million and $60 million, respectively, on the success of albums which, frankly, had significantly outsold Prince's recent efforts, the $100 million figure did seem extravagant and even misguided. It seems to have been brokered thusly: a $10 million advance for each of the six albums, $20 million "to restructure Prince's existing record label, Paisley Park Records, and establish an additional joint venture record label," and another $20 million advance from Warner/Chappel, the music publishing arm of Warner Brothers, for other joint ventures. None of this money, however, was cash on hand, as each advance was predicated on the previous album's sales; thus, the $60 million in advances was more likely worth $30 million (Phillips, "Just How…").[16]

[16] See also BCdotWeb in the Works Cited. The complexities of the deal would require a great deal of space to fully clarify, but essentially, if Warner Brothers did not recoup its advance on an album, the balance would be deducted from the royalties Prince would have received from his previous albums' continued sales. See also Hahn, 184-86.

In retrospect, some believe that Warner Brothers intended this large contract and its sizeable advances "to motivate Prince to invest the same effort into future releases as he'd done for *Diamonds & Pearls*: releasing albums less frequently and promoting them heavily via singles, videos and extensive touring" (BCdotWeb). The investment in Paisley Park Records and other recording and publishing ventures suggests Warner Brothers hoped Prince would channel his considerable energies and vision into the development of other artists, perhaps between his own, more modestly-paced releases. However, this seems to have been the exact moment when Prince was reconsidering the worth and viability of crossover and integrationist methods, especially the notion that one musician could—or should—appeal to White and Black audiences in one record or even one album; not only was that extremely difficult to achieve, it was also responsible for no small amount of stress. However, inclusion and democracy remained important values for Prince, and I hasten to assert that his model of integration (economic or artistic) had always been radically pluralistic, a hallmark of his personal beliefs. It was also what made him, as I've argued elsewhere, an event in the philosophical sense.[17]

Rather than abandon this ideology, Prince seems to have found an alternative method with which to continue it: the release of a multiplicity of artistic works. Instead of trying to reach all people with one album, he could release multiple albums with diverse appeals in more rapid succession, which would also allow him to express the full, awesome breadth of his talents and visions. Much in the same way that George Clinton had positioned Parliament as a more commercially-minded funk group and Funkadelic as a more experimental fusion of psychedelic rock, R&B, and funk, Prince could direct certain albums toward White or crossover audiences while directing other albums toward Black audiences. This in no way discounts his desire to regain ownership of his master recordings; in fact, ownership of the masters would have given him more creative and professional freedom. In sum, this new philosophy rejected the White-centrism of traditional integrationism, destabilizing and dispersing the standards of content, taste, and success. This, in turn, brought him closer to the Black empowerment values of community building, economic self-sufficiency, solidarity, and cultivation of a robust Black cultural discourse while addressing the plurality within the Black community itself, including the contentious divide between the Black middle class and working class.

Warner Brothers, however, was already balking at this approach, and, as we shall see, they would continue to do so. From a purely capitalist point of view, one can understand why. For instance, if Warner Brothers acquiesced to releasing three Prince albums a year (as had once been common practice in the industry), Prince would have fulfilled his six-album contract in two years. The point of a six-album contract is to secure the artist's capital for a significant period of time, partly for the sake of immediate profit and also to prevent the artist from signing with a competitor. Therefore, we must consider the degree to which Prince's problems with his label's limitations and lethargy—admittedly common practices throughout the corporate music industry—arose from his desire to release multiple projects which could please so-called

[17] See my book, *Nothing Has Been Done Before: Seeking the New in 21st-Century American Music* (2017), in which I apply the philosopher Alain Badiou's concept of the event to Prince's music in the 1980s; the key point, however, is that the event was not just constituted by music, but also by Prince's introduction of a sphere of possibilities for being and social life, which I've named "queer democracy."

"crossover" White and Black middle-class audiences and working class Black audiences alike. This, of course, put him into a historical dialogue with any number of Black musicians, especially those, like George Clinton, who produced dynamic, diverse music without an ounce of intention to ignore their Black audiences.

Over the course of his career, Prince had sometimes changed artistic and thematic directions within the course of a year, and so in 1991, his audience was unsure what would happen next. The following year, however, the ☥ (*Love Symbol*) album continued very much in the vein of *Diamonds and Pearls*: a heavy R&B sound with the robust drumming of Michael B. and Sonny Thompson on bass guitar, the continued presence of the Game Boyz, the three-man rap/B-Boy crew led by rapper Tony M., and Prince's characteristic stylistic diversity. Gone, unfortunately, was Rosie Gaines, whose powerful gospel vocalizing on "Diamonds and Pearls" helped traverse the song's bridge between pop fluff and a deeper, spiritual substance.[18] The ☥ (*Love Symbol*) album was also notable for its introduction of Mayte Garcia, a dancer who would eventually become Prince's first wife. Nineteen years old at the time of ☥'s release, Garcia's persona was pivotal to the album's plot in which Prince woos the underage daughter of an Egyptian king as they search for three mythical "chains of gold." Garcia was, in fact, of Puerto Rican descent, and was born in Alabama. Nonetheless, her presence reflected Prince's investment in Egyptian and Middle Eastern sonics, which combined with R&B and pop-rock most potently on the album's hit single "7." As Baldwin asserts, the prevalence of Egyptian history and myth in nation-conscious hip-hop in the late 1980s and early 1990s was often at odds with the relatively more present-mindedness of gangsta rap, a symbol of the divide between the former's middle-class "college educated" perspective and the latter's working-class street philosophy and focus on immediate problems (234-5). While *Around the World in a Day* used Middle Eastern sounds to signify utopia and cosmopolitanism, for the remainder of Prince's career, Egyptian culture and motifs would often be at the center of his most intersectional race-class-gender critiques, and even before he left Warner Brothers, as we shall see, the biblical story of *Exodus* would symbolize the more collective leanings of his developing class consciousness.

On its own terms, ☥ is a dazzling master class on Black American music, from the James Brown funk of "Sexy M.F." and the lush jazz ballad "Damn U" to the 70s AOR soul of "Sweet Baby" and "And God Created Woman." The song "Blue Light" is pop reggae. "Love 2 the 9's" is a fascinating song, moving through a unique R&B groove with jazz coloring before it careens into an intense rap section with record scratching, then back into a jazz/dance groove. *Diamonds and Pearls* is almost entirely devoid of horns, but here they make a big comeback, including at the end of the otherwise rock-R&B-rap tune "The Flow." That song follows "Arrogance," an almost unclassifiable blend of punk, jazz, and rap filled with samples from N.W.A. and the classic line, "pimp rag, Tootsie pop, and a cane." Rap is indeed fully present here, mainly delivered by Tony M., but perhaps the overlooked story of ☥ and an intriguing complication is the heavy presence of club tracks: "The Max," "I Wanna Melt with U," "The Continental," and the album opener, "My Name Is Prince." Arguably, popular music criticism has tended to evade dance music in terms of its class meanings, focusing instead on Adorno-esque mass media critiques of repetition or identifying it primarily as representational evidence of certain "youth

[18] Gaines was also a formidable foil to Prince's lead vocals on his version of "Nothing Compares 2 U," a live version of which was released on the 1993 box set *The Hits/B-Sides*.

cultures" and youth subcultures, often along racialized lines. By ignoring the class components of dance music in its many forms, critics tacitly reject the notion that young people work and are working-class, which contributes to the suppression of what Lipsitz describes in "Against the Wind" as popular music's "implicit and sometimes explicit criticism" of the capitalist devotion to work via the energetics of dancing (112). This, of course, has particular importance for the doubly-oppressed Black working class in the United States, for whom dance music offers respite and recharging in the face of systematic inequity.[19] The quartet of club songs on ☥ can certainly be heard in this context, but "My Name Is Prince" adds even more layers of meaning.

The combination of mythologizing, signifying, and outright bragging in "My Name Is Prince" makes it an important bookend for the album's final and autobiographical song, "The Sacrifice of Victor." Together, they situate the album's "Three Chains O' Gold" plot as an interior narrative which should tell us something about the man making the music. What that "something" is, I can't hypothesize here, but the operatic scope, romanticism, and clashing motifs of history and modernity intriguingly demonstrate a new kind of self-awareness. "My Name Is Prince" includes Prince saying he's "seen the top, and it's just a dream," which is followed by a somewhat standard-issue rejection of materialism in favor of religious devotion. These declarations are contrasted significantly by the more personable, detailed narrative in "The Sacrifice of Victor," a thick funk-gospel workout introduced by the one of the album's two "Segues." In each, actor Kirstie Alley (known for her role in the later seasons of the sitcom *Cheers*) portrays a nosy journalist named Vanessa Bartholomew. In the first segue, she calls Prince, but he hangs up on her when she informs him that she's recording their conversation, a real-life violation of Prince's terms for interviews. In the second segue, she answers Prince's call in which he uses a "tone-box" to lower and delay his voice. They banter about his name, asserted now as "Victor," Prince claims to be 320 years old, and she notes Mayte's (fictional) age. "You know, if you don't give me the real story, I'll have to make one up on my own. So why don't you tell me the truth?" "The truth," Prince mutters, and from the echo emerges Sonny T. asking, "What is sacrifice?" Prince signals the song's gospel vibe by instructing to the gospel group The Steeles, "Church, if you will, please turn to the Book of Victor." The story which ensues includes Prince asserting that he was "epileptic 'til the age of seven," a claim he would revisit later in his career. "I was sure heaven marked the deck," he continues, establishing the song's theme of overcoming the odds. The next verses build a portrait of a young working-class Black American child of Prince's generation: he endures the forced integration of public schools in 1967 which makes him and the other children "unsuspecting political tools" and then watches, a year later, as his friends' weed smoke is overwhelmed by the smoke from riots following the assassination of Martin Luther King Jr. He concludes: "Education got important, so important to Victor/ A little more important than ripple and weed/ Bernadette's a lady, and she told me,/ "Whatever you do, son, a little discipline is what you need/ Is what you need—you need to sacrifice." The allusion

[19] At the risk of perpetuating the disregard I'm criticizing, I've omitted from this essay much, if any, consideration of the numerous extended dance mixes and remixes of Prince's songs. This practice reached a particularly intense level between 1991 and 1995, with the "Universal Love Remix" version of the 1993 song "Space" (from *Come*) being considered one of the best remixes of any Prince song (Thorne 310). The space limitations, no pun intended, of this already very long essay prevent me from accounting for these remixes, but suffice it to say, they represent an important connection between Prince and young White and Black working-class clubgoers.

to Bernadette Anderson is intriguing not because Prince was thinking about her—there's no reason to think he had not been thinking about her, or her advice, his entire career—but because he chose to name her in the song. Indeed, given the various highly sexualized female personae and characters who had appeared in Prince's songs and videos, Ms. Anderson was something of an "icon of opposition" herself, being quite known in Minneapolis' Black community as an activist and den mother. From there, the song emphasizes the ways in which "sacrifice" demands both turning the page and sacrificing others—"Sometimes, you gotta leave the one you love," a lyric which acquired new meaning in light of his troubles with Warner Brothers—and the necessity of sheer endurance, of "walkin' down this road" because there's "joy around the corner." "When I reach my destination," sings Prince as the song ends, "my name will be Victor."

There's much to read and contemplate in this song, including the fact that Prince is experimenting with the changing of his name less than a year before officially changing it to the ☥ found on the cover of this album. While he'd used plenty of aliases and personas before this, the use of ☥ was obviously drastic, and, as I'll discuss, tied into his "slave critique" one year later. The use of aliases offers subjugated people opportunities to resist the identities bestowed on them by their oppressors, and in a capitalist culture, of course, those identities are frequently commodified. For the Black working class, names may become sites of resistance to one's racialized role, including the suppression of one's full being, in a work setting. This is one subtle reason why "The Sacrifice of Victor" was Prince's most overtly "working class" song to date. Additionally, its combination of discipline and sacrifice—the latter seen as a necessary price of the former, while the former potentially regulates the latter morally and ethically—is necessary for the continuation of one's faithfulness to the dream, be it Martin Luther King's or Prince's own artistic-political vision. But these two qualities also point to the arguments which would support his claims against Warner Brothers: that his discipline and sacrifice—and his name—were being exploited.

That Prince saw this song as a turning point is indicated by its use as the title for a 1993 television special which aired on MTV after he changed his name, on June 7, 1993 (his birthday), to the unpronounceable symbol. The special, eventually released on VHS in Europe, documented an aftershow during the Act II tour on September 8, 1993, in London, England ("*The Sacrifice of Victor*"). The brief concert featured two songs, the blues rave-up "The Ride" and the gospel-blues anti-drug song "The Undertaker," also recorded during an unreleased "Paisley Park Power Trio" session that included only Prince, Michael Bland, and Sonny Thompson. Here "The Undertaker" is performed by Mavis Staples and The Steeles, who also perform the thoroughly contemporary gospel song "House in Order." Prince covered "Jailhouse Rock" and "In the Mood," curiously, and debuted on television the unreleased rock song "Peach" which would soon appear on *The Hits/B-Sides*. In short, the film's music shed little light on Prince's motivations for the name change or Victor, but it continued his renewed devotion to historically Black musical genres and their working-class roots, especially as expressed through the time-honored tradition of the aftershow, which continued to connect him to the legacy of his father's generation and their tradition of creating spaces that enabled them to exist as both working musicians and griots who could balance performing for White audiences while acting as

Trojan horse soldiers impacting (modifying if not changing) White sensibilities through song and performance.[20]

1993 – 1995: From *Come* to *Exodus*

For the first time in a decade, Prince didn't release a new studio album in 1993, but it was nonetheless a pivotal and productive year.[21] We enter here into a phase of intense creativity and complicated chronology that will challenge my ability to adequately cover it all. Prince recorded essentially two sets of songs: one that was originally intended for *Glam Slam Ulysses*, a dance production which retold the story of Homer's *The Odyssey*, and songs intended for use by The New Power Generation (or NPG), a side-project which, much like George Clinton's balancing of Parliament and Funkadelic, would ostensibly allow Prince to release more of his work. Some of this latter grouping of songs did get released on the 1993 album *Gold Nigga*, which was only sold at live shows during the Act II tour (Thorne 305). Dominated by Tony M.'s rapping, the album draws from the West Coast, midtempo, G-funk style which skyrocketed into popularity the previous year with the release of Dr. Dre's *The Chronic*. One standout track is the satirical "Black M.F. in the House" about the exclusion of Black Americans from clubs, i.e., shared public-private spaces and in which Prince deploys a ridiculous white Southern accent. Most of the NPG songs were played at aftershows, and one widely circulated bootleg recording from the April 11, 1993, show in San Francisco finds Prince addressing the crowd about the federal civil rights trial against the four LAPD officers who'd beaten Rodney King in 1991 but had been acquitted the following year, sparking what is often identified as the Los Angeles Rebellion. "So what do you think the verdict will be?" Prince asks the crowd. The audience responds, "Guilty!" Prince laughs and the band plays "Black M.F. in the House," as if to challenge the audience's naiveté. The satire of "Black M.F. in the House" works similarly to the kind at work in Paul Beatty's 2015 novel *The Sellout*: it is really an absurdist approach which exposes the absurdism of racism, but in a way that tasks the readers, or listeners, to work through the critique themselves.

Meanwhile, the set of songs from *Glam Slam Ulysses* split in two. One subgroup found its way onto the 1994 album *Come*, the last "Prince" album. Overall the music was more aggressive and club-oriented than ☥, especially bangers like "Space," "Pheromone," and "Loose!" while more laid-back R&B jams like "Come" (a staggering eleven-minutes long) and "Letitgo," very much in the West Coast vibe, provided a counterbalance. The latter is a confession of despair and a declaration of renewed emotional honesty. "Papa" mines the same coming-of-age territory as "The Sacrifice of Victor," revisiting the image of an abusive father who corrects his child, who's been "throwing rocks at passing cars," by isolating the child in a closet before administering corporal punishment. The final, spoken line before the coda, "Don't abuse children or they'll end up like me," is filled with the misguided self-loathing frequently experienced by children of abusive parents, and it shows that Prince's mind was still focused on how behavior is passed from generation to generation, as on *Graffiti Bridge*. "Papa" is follow by

[20] My thanks to C. Liegh McInnis for this last observation. The aftershow had only continued to grow in importance for Prince and his fans, and it becomes especially important during this period between 1993 – 1995.
[21] His first greatest hits compilation was released in 1993: *The Hits/The B-Sides*.

"Race," an energetic R&B song with an almost punk directness. However, its central claim—that if we didn't learn history, we would never learn to replicate the racism of the past—is entirely problematic. Equating history with "B.S. propagandi [sic]," Prince adds: "I don't wanna know/Why those before us hated each other/I'd rather believe they never did…." What's compelling about this message is not just how quickly Prince would abandon it with a song like "We March" on *The Gold Experience*, or that its message completely contradicts the lesson Prince delivers near the end of "Papa," but also that its shortsighted perspective echoes claims often made by Whites when confronted by the racialized political and economic oppression of Black Americans in the present. In this situation, to reject the past as something from which we may learn is a covert way of rejecting the past, itself, and also the reality of the present, a strategy which better serves those who are more economically secure and likely have been raised that way. Also compelling is how the song reproduces a weaker version of the utopian vision about which Prince sang in the 1980s, highlighting the tension between a naïve progressivism and the acknowledgment of (and accountability for) the institutional traditions of marginalization and oppression upon which the present day is built.

Prince, ever mercurial, scrawled "Slave" on his face for the first time the following year, immediately abandoning the disavowal of history in "Race." The reasons for this provocative move are often attributed to Prince learning around this time, circa 1993-1994, that even once he had fulfilled his contractual obligation of five remaining albums for Warner Brothers, he would still not own his master recordings (Stiegler 214). But at least one source, his former manager Randy Phillips (noted above), suggests Prince knew this as early as 1991. The more plausible reason is that when Prince presented Warner Brothers with three albums for release in early 1994—*Come*, an early version of *The Gold Experience*, and the NPG album *Exodus*—the label was concerned about oversaturating the market in the wake of somewhat disappointing sales for ☥ and declined to release all three albums (Stiegler 213-214). *Come* was released in August of that year with almost no promotion. Prince seemed to have had enough. Some of his motivation certainly stemmed from the allure of being released from his contract sooner, especially with the release of *The Black Album* in 1994. But again, this would not have solved the problem of not owning his master recordings. It would have, however, given Prince the control over his own work that he sought. Prince's tour manager, Alan Leeds, has stated that the two discussed mail-order distribution other than Warner Brothers no later than early 1993 (Thorne 298). In fact, Warner Brothers agreed to let Prince distribute the single "The Most Beautiful Girl in the World" independently in 1994. Prince's European publicist at the time, Chris Poole, believes the corporation assumed the endeavor would fail (Thorne 307). Instead, it hit #2 on the US R&B/Hip-Hop charts, #3 on the Hot 100, and was also Prince's first #1 single in the United Kingdom.

If anything, Prince was emboldened, if also increasingly frustrated. NPG drummer Michael Bland recalls, "That was a strange time for all of us. That was a lot of days of us coming to rehearse and him being furious after just talking to Warner Bros. on the phone. And instead of rehearsing, he spends two hours venting to us about what's going on. He was so distraught. It just sent him into a tailspin. Day to day, we didn't know what we were walking into coming into rehearsal" (Browne). Prince's appearance with the NPG on *The Late Show with David Letterman* in December 1994 certainly reflects this struggle, but it's also a study in how capitalism, neoliberalism, and, to some extent, whiteness responded to Prince's protestations. Earlier in the

show, a Letterman persona goads the host by asking, "What do you call him?" That the response is the ☥ sign—literally a cardboard cutout of the symbol—is played for big laughs shows how Prince's conflict with Warner Bros., capitalism, and racism is not taken seriously by many whites and may also indicate that the larger Black community's issue with capitalism and white supremacy is also not taken seriously by most whites. To be clear, I am not indicting Letterman as being maliciously racist, but the running bit/theme of that show indicates Letterman's own inability to grasp the various ways in which white supremacy manifests oppression into the lives of people of color. Introducing the performance segment, Letterman says, "The song he will doing for us tonight is from this CD right here, which is entitled *The Gold Experience*, and I'm told this particular CD will never be released. So it makes perfect sense that he's here promoting it tonight." This gets a big laugh. When Letterman holds up the symbol of Prince's new name, the audience titters. Even bearing in mind that this is a comedy show, the mocking feels cruel. I read this as a defensive reaction to all of the norms Prince has radically called into question, not the least of which is a Black musician's eagerness to fulfill the consumeristic expectations of Letterman's predominately White and so-called hip viewership.

Prince enters morosely, either embarrassed or angry, and picks up his guitar. With "slave" written on his face, he begins the then-unreleased "Dolphin": "How beautiful do the words have to be/ Before they conquer every heart?/ How will you know if I'm even in the right key/ If you make me stop before I start?" I'm not above thinking that Prince had anticipated the audience's derisive reactions; he had certainly already experienced this ridicule after announcing his "death." He proceeds tentatively through the song, his voice off-key (either an intentional reference to the lyric, or more likely because his earbud mix is off). As has been known to happen, the performance picks up with his electric guitar solo, the band leaping on the transition back into the chorus. In the outro, Prince lays down his guitar, forms the barrel of a gun with his fingers, and shoots himself in the head. Cradled by Mayte, who's wearing a white angelic costume, Prince is then unceremoniously dragged offstage. "Yeah!" shouts Letterman, apparently undisturbed. Certainly Prince's performance was highly theatrical, but this was the second time in several months that Prince had performed suicidal ideation.[22] It was, unfortunately, neither the first nor the last time that a Black artist's expression of suffering would serve as "harmless entertainment" for a mass, generally White audience.

In fact, this was the third time Prince had performed, on record or live, a suicidal gesture if you count *The Black Album*, which was finally released one month before the appearance on Letterman's show, and the song "Bob George," which can be heard as a "death-by-cop" narrative. Why *The Black Album*, one of the most famous bootlegs of all time, was released in November 1994 is a bit of a mystery. Usually it's explained as one way in which Prince could more quickly reach his six-album agreement, but at the same time it certainly contradicted Warner Brothers' position against saturating the market since *Come* was released three months prior. (On the other hand, the label may have believed *The Black Album* would nudge along the sales of that album.) Regardless, the timing of the release is significant from the perspective of Prince's relationship with the Black working class, even if it's rarely considered that way. I'm tempted not to make too much of the album's title, but its additional allusions—it may have referenced a popular Beatles bootleg of the early 1980s, also titled *The Black Album*, which

[22] The other was the lyric "Better off dead if I couldn't be alone" in "Letitgo."

collected songs from the *Get Back* sessions; it may also have been a winking to the infamous album in the film *Spinal Tap*—actually suggest a pluralistic understanding of Black American identity in so far that Black people need not keep themselves from enjoying any music they wish, a freedom which by "crossover" logic seemed to have only been afforded to White music-lovers. (This need not contradict the inter-community plurality of "2 Nigs United 4 West Compton" mentioned earlier.) At the same time, the original title for *The Black Album* was *The Funk Bible*, and that it is. In the context of 1994 and the crossover rise of gangsta rap, the album's vaunted expressions of Black masculine heterosexuality may have sounded less taboo to White and Black middle-class ears, but the desperation and intensity of its emotions, the unquiet mind lurking within nearly every song, suited Prince's frame of mind as he battled with Warner Brothers. This may be a bridge too far, but from the perspective of 1994, *The Black Album* can be understood as a treatise on how the psychosis induced by a commodity-driven culture results in oppressed people's desire for self-determination and ownership to be psychologically displaced into sexual and romantic relations.[23]

Prince, however, did not really acknowledge the release *The Black Album*, concentrating instead on recording new material and the impending release of *The Gold Experience*, which endured numerous configurations in 1994 before it was released in the fall of 1995 ("*The Gold Experience*."). While Prince's "slave" body art was featured in the three contemporaneous music videos ("Eye Hate U," "Gold," and "Dolphin"), the album doesn't contain references to Prince's battle with the record label as blatant as "Jughead." It is deeply concerned with class, however, from the opening song "P. Control," ostensibly a feminist anthem in which an economically self-sufficient businesswoman tells a man, "You could go platinum four times and still couldn't make what I make in a week," to the closing ballad "Gold," which asks what the purpose of money is when it's not the result of innovation—anti-materialist, like "Diamonds and Pearls" and many beforehand, but also an allusion to Warner Brothers' definition of success. The two songs from the aborted *Glam Slam Ulysses* production are even more pointed. In the rocker "Endorphinemachine," Prince declares, "Every now and then there comes a time you must defend/Your right to die and live again, live again, live again," an allusion to the symbolic death of "Prince"—*The Gold Experience* was the first album attributed to ☥—and perhaps the artist's relentless pursuit of new horizons. "Dolphin" also speaks of rebirth in light of a defiant promise that the singer will "die before I let you tell me how to swim," which of course adds meaning to Prince's performance on Letterman's show. Another prominent theme on the album and its outtakes is betrayal, and in the context of Prince's very public battle with Warner Brothers, it was impossible not to hear these various tales of infidelity and treachery—the love-hate heartbreak of "Eye Hate U" and the then-unreleased "Acknowledge Me," the gossiping of "Billy Jack Bitch," the existential threat in "Dolphin," the social betrayal in the outtake "Strays of the World"—as undercover dialogues between Prince and Warner Brothers and even, perhaps, his audience. In the outtake "Interactive," a rock tune with a thick funky bass line, Prince intones, "I work twice as hard/to follow you no matter how far/[But] To you I'm probably worth no more than the strings on this guitar…Ain't that a bitch?" To whom is he talking: his label or the fans who mock his protests against that label?

[23] "Cindy C.," an ode (of sorts) to the White supermodel Cindy Crawford, adds a mediated dimension to this critique.

The Gold Experience era is another step in Prince's complex understanding of himself as a Black American artist, be it his belonging in various classed Black communities or his relationship with his white audience. Prince biographer Matt Thorne refers to "Shy" as Prince's "psychosexual response to gangsta rap," a reductive reading of not only Prince's previous work but the song's sublime instrumentation—it's one of the few songs by Prince which is almost entirely absent of percussion, its arrangement consisting almost exclusively of guitar—and narrative (312). The singer has traveled to Los Angeles seeking inspiration; there he meets a woman with "cool dark skin in hot virgin white" who goes by the name of "Shy." His story becomes hers: "…I passed my initiation/A friend of mine, he got killed and in retaliation/I shot the boy…twice in the head/No regrets, no sorrow/I'm going back tomorrow to make sure he's dead/'Cuz if I don't, they'll call me a chicken…." Despite the troubling lyric, "Her lips say 'No,' but her body say 'Might,'" Prince has afforded Shy a significant amount of agency in the span of a verse, really, and placed at the center of this narrative a Black woman often marginalized from rap narratives. The final twist of the song may be read as a sly comment on the importance of authenticity in rap narratives and hip-hop culture (when authenticity is understood as "street cred") and Prince's own lack of this authenticity. "Fact or fiction, he wondered," Prince sings, adding in a moment that he writes "Shy" at the "top of the page." In other words, "Shy" can be understood as a song about writing a song, and this metafictional element, playing with the listener's expectations, asks us to consider the grounds on which we determine authenticity through the bases of race, gender, and to a lesser extent, class.

"Shy" indeed signals an affinity with the working-class and para-economical culture of gangsta rap, but by 1994 the genre had exploded in popularity, and, arguably, had become over-commercialized and thoroughly integrated into the American spectacle. Thus, Prince's dialogue regarding authenticity is even more fitting. Ironically, *The Gold Experience* era features three of Prince's best rap performances, "P. Control," "Now" (more for its delivery than content), and "Days of Wild," a deeply funky groove left off the album but frequently played at aftershows and eventually released in live form on the 1998 boxset *Crystal Ball*. On these songs Prince has finally found a way to make rap work for him aesthetically, and the bracing combination of 70s funk, thick bass guitar, and live drums fulfill the potential in his earlier rap attempts. During performances of "Days of Wild" at Paisley Park and tour aftershows, he would often encourage the audience to shout "Free the slave!" with him. However, while there's no reason to believe Prince wanted to spurn his White audience, he did seem more acutely aware, or simply more vocal about, the ways in which race mattered to even his most ardent white fans. It's worth noting that in another outtake from this time period, "What's My Name?," Prince mutters, "You never would have drank my coffee if I had never served you cream." In other words, his White audience would not have accepted the R&B, traditionally Black foundations of his music, had he not integrated—diluted?—those foundations with the White elements of rock and pop (presumably). This is, on the one hand, a quick turnabout on his own song, "Cream," one of his most pop-oriented. On the other hand, though, in the context of rap's growing "crossover" popularity, it suggests that rap's journey and Prince's journey were becoming very similar. If he had not recognized that in 1987, he was certainly aware of it now.

I'll note briefly that Prince was embracing rap and the Black American working class at a time when both were under fire. The repercussions of the 2 Live Crew obscenity trial in 1990, the furor over Ice T's "Cop Killer" song (performed with his hardcore band, Body Count), the

Rodney King beating in 1991, the initial acquittal of all four LAPD officers in 1992, the ensuing six-day Los Angeles Rebellion, the conviction of only two of those officers in the civil rights trial of 1993, and the commercial success of West Coast gangsta rap had all placed an enormous pressure on rap and hip hop in the media, usually at the expense of the real problems faced by the Black American working class and poor. As Kelley writes in *Race Rebels*, "a good deal of gangsta rap is…a window into, and a critique of, the criminalization of black youth" (185). In 1994, C. Delores Tucker of the National Political Congress of Black Women convinced two members of the Black Congressional Caucus to convene hearings on rap which brought into the political spotlight the generational and class divides within Black communities. As George Lipsitz notes in his book *Footsteps in the Dark: The Hidden Histories of Popular Music*, "For many young people who came of age as witnesses to the era of deindustrialization, the 'victories' of the Civil Rights generation seem insubstantial. They came to know the meaning of race through their experiences, from long periods of unemployment, sporadic work at entry-level low-wage jobs, pervasive housing discrimination, stark educational inequality, oppressive police brutality, and toxic levels of environmental pollution in their neighborhoods" (160-61). The hearings did not address these problems, but rather pointed the finger at rap's misogynistic and violent lyrics. Lipsitz argues that by focusing on the so-called moral failings of inner-city Black youth, the hearings "suppresse[d] social memory by claiming that only culture counts, that history…has nothing to do with the social disintegration of our society" (172). In contrast, Prince was increasingly trying to make that history known, and while he was unlikely to be caught in the congressional crossfire, if we bear in mind his own encounter with Tipper Gore's censorious campaign, we might understand his continued embrace of rap as a reaction to the politically-motivated suppression of Black working class voices and concerns.

Prince's struggle against Warner Brothers existed in the overlap between two Black working-class ideologies: that of the gangsta/G-funk para-economy, understood as one result and a parallel reiteration of the fundamental immorality of mainstream, hegemonic, and White-dominated capitalism, and, on the other hand, a Black empowerment or Black nationalist ideology which emphasizes self-determination, collective purpose, communal improvement, and structural change. We have seen a few ways in which Prince attempted to work in a parallel but separate fashion from the mandates of the music industry, e.g., the independent release of "The Most Beautiful Girl in the World," his interest in direct distribution (which would blossom with the continued development of the internet), and the importance of aftershows. At the same time, his more direct confrontation with Warner Brothers was, in essence, a demand for radical structural changes to the contractual, and, thus, legal framework of the music industry. It is one thing to demand a higher wage, or a larger cut of the profits; it's another thing all together to demand ownership of one's work. To varying degrees, the para-economical ideology and Black empowerment ideology each reject the attempts by elites to claim that a higher cultural status, i.e., popularity via media, or "exposure," is an acceptable or justifiable substitute for real economic power. Increasingly, this was Prince's position, as well. It did not matter that he could easily appear on magazine covers or television shows. We can also triangulate Prince's position, to a lesser degree, by the reception to his actions—his symbolic death, taking of a new, unpronounceable name, public criticism of Warner Brothers, and writing "slave" on his cheek. As in the congressional hearings on rap, critics questioned *his* morality and sanity, not the morality or sanity of the economic system he was criticizing. The claims that he was simply being eccentric pathologized him, implying in a cavalier though subtextual manner that he was

mentally ill. On the other hand, he faced not so subtle criticisms of being too aggressive, too ambitious, too impatient, reproaches one hears, of course, from middle-class and integrationist (and White supremacist) critics of Black empowerment and Black nationalism.

It was perhaps inevitable that within the American pop spectacle, Prince's rebellion against Warner Brothers and writing of "Slave" on his face would be consumed by the standards of late capitalism, celebrity, and a kind of literalism which we may call "socio-empirical aesthetics" in which art—in this case, popular music—is perceived to be in dialogue only with verifiable social (i.e., public) narratives and actors. This is also a highly presentist approach to art appreciation and criticism; it looks only at the recent past, or dehistoricizes the past, and has little to no concept of a future. One example of this framework is Zack Stiegler's article "Slave 2 the System: Prince and the Strategic Performance of Slavery." Vaguely drawing upon Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's concept of strategic essentialism in which a minority collective may willingly but temporarily identify as "one" along essentialist lines, and thus minority individuals may perform essentialist traits, for the sake of political solidarity, Stiegler argues that "[b]y building upon the imagery and rhetoric of slavery and the Civil Rights movement, Prince engage[d] in a strategic essentialism to articulate his dispute with Warner Brothers" (226). There is no mention that Prince was literally the descendent of enslaved Africans, a glaring absence and a flaw in the application of so-called "strategic" identifications of one's own heritage. Furthermore, as Spivak means the term, strategic essentialism is an agreed-upon contract among social actors and less so an assertion by one single actor.[24] Recognizing that this strategy is generally meant for collective gain, Stiegler does acknowledge that Prince used it for the betterment of other artists. However, the overall implication is that Prince used the "slave" strategy primarily for his own purposes, and, as such, Stiegler produces a biographical reading that marginalizes not only the contemporaneous sociopolitical contexts but also the performative aspects in his article's title.

A key example is his reading of the live performance of "Days of Wild" included on *Crystal Ball* in which the audience chants along to Prince's call to "Free the slave." Stiegler writes that "when audiences join in on these chants…they likely do so as a means of participating in the performance event rather than as an expression of resistance. The audience has little, if any political investment in Prince's battle against the music industry…" (225-26). This is a baseless assumption. If we cannot know what the audience was thinking, why must we assume that it believed this phrase applied only to Prince's situation? Additionally, why should we believe that Prince believed the phrase applied only to his situation? Simply put, Stiegler does not imagine that Prince's declarations may extend beyond the subject of his career, or even his fellow musicians, and speak to his audience's imagination, including, importantly, the imagination of a Black working class audience caught in the vice of capitalistic exploitation. By perpetuating a very problematic notion of authenticity—through, I would argue, a basic misunderstanding of performance—Stiegler obscures the fact that, while there is no way to measure a person's intentions, we may measure the effectiveness of one's actions in ending

[24] Spivak, who coined the term in the mid-1980s and elaborated on it in her 1988 book, *Can the Subaltern Speak?*, began disavowing the term by 1993 "after witnessing its use not as a mobilizing slogan but as a master word, not as a means to an end (a strategy) but as itself justified" (Watlington n.p.).

injustice by looking at the outcomes. While Prince had very real and personal reasons to oppose Warner Brothers, many other artists have testified that Prince's actions helped them either by educating them about their own circumstance, inspiring them to become more educated about that circumstance, or inspiring them to seize as much control of their circumstance as possible. Given the situation then and now within the music industry, i.e., that this circumstance not only involves the continued alienation of artistic workers from the products of their labor, Prince has served in the tradition of the Civil Rights Movement as an activist for working class rights.[25]

It is telling that, after claiming that Prince "abandoned his location within African-American expressive traditions for most of his career"—a statement which I hope I have proven false in this essay—and that "his attempts to invoke this powerful imagery and rhetoric seemingly failed," Stiegler's evidence of this failure consists of four quotes from music critics and four comments from anonymous participants in a Prince-centered Usenet group from the 1990s who together, writes Stiegler, found "Prince's behavior eccentric and offensive" (227-28). We can't know the identity of the anonymous participants, but the critics are all white men. Without meaning to do so, perhaps, Stiegler shows how whiteness responds when confronted by the inadequacies and oppression of capitalism: it either misses the point or willfully reduces a potentially radical argument about the alienation of Black laborers from their work. This echoes the treatment of Prince's name change on *The Late Show with David Letterman*. Certainly Prince's use of "slave" rhetoric was sensitive, and I don't want to suggest that Black folks of any class had zero objections. NPG drummer Michael Bland, for instance, told Prince biographer Alex Hahn, "Mostly, I rolled my eyes. There were some valid points he was making, but to me business is business, and it's important to follow through on your obligations" (197). Neither do I want to suggest white listeners were incapable of a more nuanced understanding than those quoted by Stiegler. But it seems that, generally, members of oppressed classes were able to understand "slave" as a metaphor for the continued exploitation of Black labor—not just Prince's, but their own. For many Black Americans, Prince's "slave" rhetoric was, as it was for Prince, a deeply personal statement about one's own genealogy, and it suggested in the extreme what many of us know: that the Emancipation was met by Jim Crow, Civil Rights by Reagan, and that, today, capitalism produces individuals who are bound in an economic system designed to exploit them, and that this design disproportionately affects people of color.

It is also telling that Stiegler and numerous white critics have ignored a song in which Prince explicitly calls for collective action on *The Gold Experience*: "We March." After a brief introduction in Spanish, "Uno para todos, y todos para uno" ("One for all and all for one")—another example of Prince's career-long alliance with Latinx audiences—Prince presents a critique of class and race which recalls the Civil Rights Movement and prefigures the Flint water crisis: "If this is the same avenue my ancestors fought to liberate/ How come I can't buy a piece of it, even if my credit's straight?/ If all the water's dirty and I wanna lay the pipe, my dammy/ The river that I drink from, will it be the same as your mammy?" Musically, "We March" epitomizes what Prince came to accomplish by the mid-1990s: a fusion of new jack swing, rap, and R&B swagger with robust live drums and strategic use of electronic drums and samples, rock and gospel overtones, and his trademark stacked harmonies; the song is a politically-focused version of *Graffiti Bridge*'s "New Power Generation," no less inspirational but far more

[25] Once more, I'm grateful to C. Liegh McInnis for his input here.

specific. In the second verse, Prince addresses men who denigrate "sister[s]" as "bitch[es]," advising that she'll leave their "broke ass[es] in a ditch." In the final verse, Prince returns to the overall goal while also returning us to the assassinations of Black leaders: "Now we clarify forever/in other words, as long as it takes/ We ain't got no use for ice cream without the cake/ Ain't got no time for excuses, the promised land belongs to all/ We can march in peace, but you best watch your back if another leader falls." The metaphor of "ice cream and cake" returns listeners to 1980's "Party Up" and its use of the same image to denounce the manner in which the incompetence of the supposedly educated bourgeoise and elites contributes to the continued oppression of the working class. Once again we find evidence that Prince was, from day one, an artist who was very much concerned about using his art to impact society in a positive way, hopefully moving it to a place where all people are valued equally, which refutes those who have asserted that Prince's concern with human rights in the 1990s and beyond was merely a ploy to save his dying career and shows. We also hear Prince talking to himself, reckoning with his own legacy as it stood circa 1994 and the legacy he wished to ultimately leave behind.

A final important song I wish to highlight is "The Exodus Has Begun" from the 1995 NPG album *Exodus*. Stiegler does briefly consider this song and Prince's portrayal of a "Moses figure," but despite noting the long history of the biblical *Exodus* story in Black American music and culture, from the spiritual "Go Down Moses (Let My People Go)" to Harriet Tubman's alias, Stiegler reduces Prince's motivation to the desire to "lead other 'enslaved' recording artists to the promised land of independence from the corporate music industry" (222). That it could possibly be a metaphor for the collective emancipation of any audience, let alone the Black working class, goes unmentioned. Given the content of the album, this is a remarkable omission. The lead vocals throughout *Exodus* are sung by bass player Sonny Thompson, including the beautiful song "Count the Days," which musically and thematically echoes Curtis Mayfield and the Impressions' call for collective hope, "People Get Ready," which Prince and the NPG were playing live at this time. The track preceding "The Exodus Has Begun" is a comedic sketch, a feature of numerous rap albums dating to the late 1980s, in which the NPG forcibly board a seemingly white crew's spaceship. ("Captain," says one crew member, "I'm getting some strange readings on my vanillascope.")

With this futuristic introduction, "The Exodus Has Begun," with its heavy funk beat, pitch-lowered lead vocal, and group vocals, is a nod to Parliament-Funkadelic and the nascent Afrofuturism which had always existed in Prince's music. Consequently, in one verse, Prince and the NPG laud the future generation, "the children of the sun" who are "tearin' shit up with a vengeance and still they smile/though their lives were made bitter with hard labor and no pay." And in a subsequent verse, the message is unmistakable and scathing:

"Spatch cocks in black face offer us pennies/ When it's millions and millions upon millions they reap/ How in the world can we call ourselves equal/ When their wages outweigh the time that they keep?/ And if they stood up and behaved like the humans they're supposed 2/ As opposed 2 the way they are not/ Then this New Power Soul would not be so soulful/ And the water they're in would not be so hot/ The exodus has begun."

Of critical importance is the double-standard described in these lyrics: corporate executives who work even typical hours enjoy disproportionate economic benefit, while the

actual worker who produces the product is paid "pennies." It is the injustice of the situation which prompts the alienation of the laborer from what his labor creates, not literal slavery, of course, but this nuanced understanding which required only a basic knowledge of how corporate music publishing and distribution functions was lost on many critics, apparently. It's also important that Prince and his bandmates sing "The exodus has begun," not "will begin," or "might begin." The wheels of change are already in motion. Whether or not this was literally true—one could argue that it was—this is another example of music's ability to make abstractions real as valuable imagination in the minds of listeners, essentially concretizing a future condition as an event in the present moment of performance.

5. Conclusion: Where the Soil Is

The Gold Experience was critically successful, but lacking any obvious singles—bear in mind that "The Most Beautiful Girl in the World" had been released more than a year and half earlier—the album sold below Warner Brothers' expectations. It peaked at #2 on the US R&B/Hip-Hop Albums chart and #6 on the Billboard 200 albums chart, one indication, at least, that Prince still had the power to attract Black and white audiences. One of two singles, "Eye Hate U," reached #3 on the (again renamed) Billboard Hot R&B Singles chart and #12 on the Hot 100. This was despite Prince's significant promotion efforts, but these were marred by bad decisions: for example, Prince often lip synced on televised performances, which did no favors in communicating the urgency of these new songs.

By early 1996, another shakeup at the top level of Warner Brothers, coinciding with pressure from its parent company Time-Warner, led to the conclusion of Prince's tenure with the label that signed him in 1977. He delivered two more albums to fulfill his contractual obligation: *Chaos and Disorder*, which would be released later that year, and the ragtag collection of outtakes *The Vault…Old Friends 4 Sale*, which wasn't released until 1999. Prince was now free to chart his own path, but he departed Warner Brothers without ownership of the master recordings of his songs. In the near term, his efforts seemed to have had no effect on the music industry. The bittersweet elements were leavened by an optimism about the future, due in no small part to Prince's marriage to Mayte Garcia.

Prince celebrated with the audacious triple-album *Emancipation* later that year; its cover featured two chained hands breaking free. While he stopped referring to himself as a "slave," Prince continued to develop a highly class-conscious understanding of the links between race, economics, and history on songs like "The Work, Pt. 1," "When Will We B Paid," and "Judas Smile." Taking such songs into consideration, Stiegler does not mention that Prince still did not own his master recordings. Instead, he writes, "Prince draws on slavery and the Civil Rights movement not to make historical critiques or observations, but to appropriate elements from these historical periods to construct a vision of his personal future as a recording artist, and the music industry as a whole" (232). Assumptions of intent are always complicated, but I reject the notion that Prince was not making "historical critiques or observations." Rather, he had spent the 1990s resituating himself as a Black American musician in history, as a historical subject of intersectional forces and systems of, among other things, race and class. To be a historical subject is to accept that one is in dialogue, privately or publicly, with received notions, theories, narratives, and ideologies. They are not entirely in our control, but through education and

experience, and through the dialogue itself, we may discover our agency—which may also mean that we discover a new sense of potential. Like so many of us, Prince consciously sought to discover not just his identity but also his agency, his possibilities, and, as such, he observed and even critiqued himself. But this occurred in a dialogue with—and for the benefit of—his audience, and increasingly he embraced that dialogue's historicity. While that audience excluded no one, in the early 1990s, as he struggled, he leaned heavily on Black musical traditions, forms, and genres for support while confronting and conversing with new traditions grounded in the Black American working class. He was once again part of the dialogue, and he continued it by utilizing even more traditions. In 1999, he covered the traditional Black spiritual "Sometimes I Feel Like a Motherless Child." Released in 2001, *The Rainbow Children* introduced his audience to a sweeping historical and metaphysical narrative in music that leaned heavily on jazz, a genre he would continue to explore over the next decade.

If Prince's career may be summarized as the attempt to fulfill the radical promise of the utopian vision of his youth, we must also recognize that, in his attempts to remain faithful to that promise, he struggled to understand the entirety of its implications as well as the reality of the historical situation in which he found himself. Any thinker, any artist, if they possess integrity, will face such a struggle; indeed, this is an element, engaged or not, of the dialogue. When he was forced to confront the limitations of his own artistic and economic agency in the early 1990s, class and its intersections with race became an important part of this dialogue. The collective element of his vision was enriched, but he also began negotiating and experimenting with various leadership positions from within, not above. His rejection of the corporatist power structure in the music industry no doubt influenced this, but it would seem, too, that the experience of a new collectivity coupled with a historical awareness encouraged him. While he executed the collective "memory model" aspect of dialogism described by Richard Terdiman, he also attempted to demystify the pop music industry for his audiences. Something new would have to take its place, and this would require collective reimagining capable of negotiating the same classed territory between the Black American working class and Black American middle class that rap and hip hop did before him and would continue to do. Prior to 1990 – 1995 he'd evinced what we may call an "upward mobility" model of class consciousness combined with bohemian detachment, but, now, while recognizing the economic truths expressed by gangsta rap's "parallel" model, he more fully embraced the collectivist "revolutionary" model of nation-conscious rap along with its Pan-Africanist historical awareness.

These were not fixed positions, of course, and further writing should consider the complex ways in which Prince continued the dialogue. But, one can fit a song like the 2005 single "Black Sweat," in which he celebrates his work ethic in a way which also celebrates the Black American working class, into a framework alongside overtly political songs like "Dear Mr. Man" in which he combines biblical and legal readings and sings that Black Americans "might not be in the back of the bus, but it sure feels just the same." This framework expressed a deep sense of class consciousness which speaks to and with the voices of the Black American working class and re-centered those voices—their desires, traditions, contradictions, realities, and possibilities—within Prince's artistic work. Overall, the degrees to which Prince, through his performances, spoke as someone from a Black working-class upbringing, spoke to the Black working class, and spoke about the historical and contemporary situations of the Black working

class in his music greatly increased between 1990 and 1995 and continued to develop and become enriched throughout the remainder of his life.

I am reminded, in closing, of a 1998 interview with the author Toni Morrison. Having just won the Nobel Prize for Literature, and asked to reflect on her career and success, she parallels her desire to write to, for, and about primarily a Black readership to the development of Black music. "The fact that it has become universal, worldwide, anyone, everyone can play it, and it has evolved, is because it wasn't tampered with and editorialized within the community. So I wanted the literature that I wrote to be that way" (Deans). Perhaps this purity is a bit overstated, but we do see and hear in blues, gospel, jazz, R&B, and rap strong communal traditions which then were commercialized, reappropriated, and exploited. Unlike Morrison, Prince was born at a time when the originary social and aesthetic concentrations of these genres were already being thoroughly diffused (except rap, of course). But unlike Morrison, his initial artistic actions pursued a very similar if not the same diffusion in the name of innovation and utopia. It wasn't until the 1990s that Prince performed the reclamation and recovery described by Morrison, who in the interview continues by saying: "I could just go straight to where the soil was, where the fertility was, in this landscape. And also, I wanted to feel free not to have the white gaze in *this* place, that was so precious to me, which is the work." Asked by the white interviewer if she will continue to avoid writing about and for white people, Morrison illuminates the racist double-standard of that question. "It's inconceivable" to some white readers and critics, she says, "that where I already am *is* the mainstream." She then adds, "I stood at the border, stood at the edge, and claimed it as central. And let the rest of the world move over to where I was," which is, of course, what Black music and all Black art has always done. The struggle is what happens after Black art is absorbed into the belly of whiteness.

It seems inarguable that at the beginning of his career Prince also stood at the edge and claimed it as central, but these borders primarily had to do with the fluxing of gender, sexual, and racial identity within a multiethnic and thoroughly capitalist American culture. His mainstream status depended on his crossover success, but the dialogue between him and Black Americans of all classes continued. In the 1990s, having become enlightened to the existing borders and margins in which Black Americans, especially the Black American working class, found themselves, and finding himself at those borders and margins as well, he reclaimed that position as central to his creative work and ideology and communicated that centrality to his audiences. He certainly didn't eschew commercial success or the possibility of crossover hits, but he seemed more willing to express his own perception of the white gaze. Going "straight to where the soil was," Prince cultivated from its history and musical forms new icons of opposition that suited his own situation with Warner Brothers but also worked on behalf of Black American collectivity. In other words, he identified with the classed, raced historical subjects of the Black working class and claimed them as central, not marginal, to contemporary American life and its future.

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Dirty Mind:
Prince's Influence on Sex, Race, Politics, and Culture from 1978 – 1982
by James E Cherry

In the fall of 1980, I was 18 years old, had enrolled in a local junior college with little intention of "rubbing my head against the college wall," but to hang out with friends and continue our high school ways of smoking weed, drinking Old English 800, and frequenting night clubs that usually offered one way in and one way out. Our other interests were playing in the NBA and girls. We shot air balls concerning the former, occasionally scored with the latter. Like any 18 year old, I was trying to navigate the distance between being a boy and a man with all the angst, anger, confusion, and rebellion at my disposal. With a part-time job, there was a semblance of solace at the local record store. Or as Prince said in his 1986 movie *Under the Cherry Moon*: wrecker stow. Record stores were standalone brick and mortar structures or usually located in shopping malls with names like Camelot, Tower, or Sounds of Music with rows of vinyl or cassettes separated by genre; CDs were still a few years in the offering. Musically, I was in search of something that would match my restless spirit and that would provide definition to things. I had been introduced to Gil Scot-Heron, had discovered the alternative rock of the Bus Boys, and had replayed the Sugarhill Gang's "Rapper's Delight" (1980) enough times until I knew all the lyrics ("Hotel, Motel, Holiday Inn/If your girl starts acting up . . ."). But in October of that year when I pulled an album from the record bins and held it up against florescent lights, my initial reaction was: What the hell is this?

On the cover was a black man wearing a trench coat in Speedos with a bandana around his neck standing in front of a mattress. The album was *Dirty Mind* and the artist, Prince. I was familiar with Prince's previous offerings, *For You* (1978) and *Prince* (1979). *For You*, as the title suggests, was a love album, "love" being the operative word. The album never gained traction on the charts and underwhelmed critics in the process. But there was one cut from the LP, "Soft and Wet," that received much attention from his debut which served as a portent of what his prodigious talent could produce. In many ways, *For You* felt like a dress rehearsal for a major production. And indeed, just one year later, in his self-titled effort, Prince found his voice, figured out where he was going, and how he wanted to get there. Subsequently, his sophomore recording has become a pop music classic, producing hits that became part of the soundtrack of our lives: "I Wanna Be Your Lover," "Why You Wanna Treat Me So Bad?," "Sexy Dancer," "Bambi," "I Feel For You," and "Still Waiting". With so many hits on one album, the analogy has to be made between Prince's self-title album and Michael Jackson's *Off The Wall* released in that same year. Both recordings were definitive statements from both that they had put away childish things and declared before the world that this was grown folks music that would shape the course of pop music for decades. I wasn't aware of any of that at the time. Such is the beauty of hindsight. All I knew when I plopped seven bucks and some change on the record store counter was that I couldn't hardly wait to get home and drop the lp on my turntable.

I remember the stylus rising from the vinyl, the tone arm returning to its rest position as I sat there stunned, the silence humming around me. I held the album cover, and gone was the shy, sensitive vulnerable Prince from his two previous recordings. This Prince was the all-American kid who had run away from home and had become streetwise in the pursuit of identity and survival. The album's concept was edgy and provocative, its lyrics ribald and raw. And that

was just side 1. There were songs of incest, oral sex, and ménage a trios that shocked the senses. But if that's all you got from the album, then you gleaned only what was on the surface of things. The very nature of art is to push boundaries, make one uncomfortable, provide insight into the human condition, and endure the test of time. What Prince did with *Dirty Mind* was to blur lines of funk, rock and roll, soul, rhythm and blues, and disco to create a new sound and possibly a genre all his own. James Brown comes to mind when considering the musical influences upon Prince. Prince's later work, "Sexy MF," is Brown's "Ain't It Funky" without the rap and salacious hook. And like other pop and rock stars before him, he imitated Brown's classic dance moves as well. Prince had long emulated the sense of style of Jimi Hendrix with his dress, bandana, and facial expressions, and when "Purple Rain" came along in the 1980s, its timing and phrasing is very much reminiscent of Hendrix's "Red House." He also proved to be a virtuosic performer playing all the instruments on the *Dirty Mind*. One musician Prince admired for his ability to play multiple instruments and contain complete artistic control is Stevie Wonder. "I use Stevie Wonder as an inspiration, whom I look up to a great deal just for the way that he crafted music and his connection to the spirit," Prince told Larry King in 1999. "And boy, back then I used him as a role model in trying to play all the instruments and be very self-contained and keep my vision clear." Additionally, Prince's falsetto vocals created tension against a pulsive syntheses beat that ultimately complement one another. For this he stood on the shoulders of Smokey Robinson's "Ooo Baby Baby" (for the Miracles) and channeled Sylvester's 1978 disco hit "You Make Me Feel" from *Step II*. *Dirty Mind* was not only groundbreaking for its explicit lyrics, but more so for Prince's concept of the album which marked the artistic year of his birth.

Prince's emphasis on sex was just one aspect of his impact and influence upon popular culture and music during his early years and beyond. Sexually, he always tested the limits of tolerance. The *Dirty Mind* album cover proves that, and on the back cover of his self-titled LP, you'll find him naked riding a horse. Early there was speculation about his sexuality, questions he addressed and answered in "I Wanna Be Your Lover." "I want to be your lover/your mother and your sister too" (1979). "When You Were Mine." "Oh, girl when you were mine/I used to let you wear all my clothes" (1980). Prince never shied from the issue and tried to put it to rest. From one of my favorite cuts on the *Dirty Mind* LP: "What's up little girl/I aint got time to play/Baby didn't say too much/She said are you gay?/Kinda took me by surprise, I didn't know what to do/Just looked her in her eyes and said, no, are you?" In 1981, Prince addressed the matter once again on *Controversy*: "Am I black or white/am I straight or gay?" Continuing the discourse, "Well," he said in a 1982 interview with Robert Hilburn of the *Los Angeles Times*, "let me clear up a few rumors while I have the chance. One, my real name is Prince. It's not something I made up. My dad's stage name was Prince Rogers, and he gave that to me: Prince Rogers Nelson. Two, I'm not gay." That being the case, Prince's style of dress, mannerisms, and his lyrics pushed and expanded the boundaries of what it meant to be a heterosexual male and to a degree raised questions about the very definition of manhood itself. Is manhood only defined by physical characteristics and one's sexual orientation? In the African American community of the late 1970s: Yes. Because of Prince's prodigious talent, his music may have been accepted by a Black community that didn't know what to quite make of him. This probably worked to Prince's advantage and allowed him easier access to the predominantly white world of pop and rock, which found Prince predecessors like Little Richard and others less threatening because of their perceived sexual preferences.

And then there were provocative song titles with their explicit lyrics: "Soft and Wet." "Sexy Dancer." "I Wanna Be Your Lover." "Jack You Off." "Do Me, Baby." "Sexuality." And practically every cut on the *Dirty Mind* LP. Prince not only pushed the boundaries of sexuality from 1978 – 1981, he did much to bend and shape them, much the way David Bowie did in the early 1970s. This androgyny added another level of mysteriousness to his persona, and he could've been whatever you wanted him to be. Who was this guy? Where was he from? Was Prince even his real name? Personally, all I needed to know as an 18 year old was that he was rebellious, angry, arrogant brash, bold, and the closest thing to what I thought freedom represented. Not only did he march to the beat of a different drummer, he was the drummer who created the beat. Prince is a product of the 1970s, a post-Civil Rights child whose struggle for freedom was not the same as the generation before him. During Prince's formative years, there were no more back of the bus, segregated water fountains, or separate restrooms. Post-Civil Rights (if there is such a thing) African Americans experienced a sense of upward mobility, and with it came the freedom to express and define themselves. The battle had shifted from Jim Crow to declaring who one wanted to be when one wanted to be it. Prince personified this.

Sex was a predominant theme throughout Prince's early development and continued to be so with his later success as well. But, as with all artists, they don't create in a vacuum, and Prince expressed social and political perspectives in his work during those early years. The funk infused "Party Up" from *Dirty Mind* was a direct response to President Jimmy Carter's reinstatement of the military draft. "How you gonna make me kill somebody I don't even know? ... You're gonna have to fight your own damn war/Cause we don't wanna fight no more." To Prince, the body was the body. He didn't compartmentalize sex, race, and politics. For him, they emanated from the same source, and whether it was "Head" or "Party Up," it was all in a quest for individual expression.

One of my favorite cuts from the *Controversy* album is "Anne Christian." The tune is overtly political, technically advanced, and serves as a time capsule of events from an earlier decade. First, he addresses the Atlanta Child Murders: "Annie Christian wanted to be a big star/So she moved to Atlanta and she bought a blue car/She killed black children, and what's fair is fair/If you try and say you're crazy, everybody say electric chair." Prince's obvious religious reference in "Anne Christian" is also an extension of the body and intimates that, when personal freedom is oppressed or when individuals are not allowed to express themselves, it leads to perverted socio-political behaviors, such as murder, incest. Then, he addresses the murder of John Lennon and the attempted assignation of Ronald Reagan: "Annie Christian was a whore always looking for some fun/Being good was such a bore, so she bought a gun/She killed John Lennon, shot him down cold/She tried to kill Reagan, everybody say gun control." Both Lennon's murderer and Reagan's attacker were mentally deranged. But deranged or not, both had a desire for fame and celebrity. Thus, "Annie Christian" foreshadowed today's reality television culture with its more outrageous the better mentality and society's infatuation with social media.

Another of Prince's forays into the political from *Controversy* is "Ronnie, Talk to Russia." During the early 1980s the cold war was frigid, and the arms race scorching. The song's tempo is frenetic and infused with much gunfire and sounds of warplane dropping bombs. Prince urges the leader of the free world to sit with the other world's superpower while there still

is a world. Moreover**,** Ronald Reagan, along with a succession of white male Presidents, represents the "Great White Father" persona, one that wielded authority over women and knew what was best for blacks and other minorities. With "Ronnie, Talk to Russia," Prince not only rejects that fallacy, but refutes the whole spirit of neo-conservatism behind it which holds Reagan in such high esteem today.

In all of this, Prince personified what an artist should be. He combined individual expression with a mastery of craft and a dedication to technology and produced music that continues to withstand the test of time. In effect, he carved a sound that is easily recognizable and unmistakably his alone. It's no secret that he played every instrument on the *For You* and *Dirty Mind* Lp's. Yet, in the true spirit of an artist, he was generous with his time and talent, helping to launch the careers of other artists and bands that were heavily influence by him and his distinctive sound. The Time. Vanity 6. Apollonia. Shelia E. Sue Ann all carried his imprimatur. Prince was generous with his writing talents as well, penning songs for The Bangles, Chaka Khan, Sinead O'Connor, Stevie Nicks, Madonna, etc. Additionally, working with each of these diverse artists proved fruitful for his own artistic accomplishment. White supremacy is imbedded in every aspect of American culture, and the entertainment business, in general, and the music industry, to be particular, is no exception. Prince understood that the color of his skin could be a deterrent for some white listeners. Therefore, writing songs for artists of across genre, race, and culture allowed him to expand his persona and artistic sensibilities to a mass audience. Groups like The Time and Sheila E received heavy rotation on urban radio while O'Connor and Madonna dominated Top 40 stations and MTV.

As such, Prince's influence can even be such altruism, in effect, that elevated Prince from a mere individual artist to a cultural icon. Part of his iconic appeal was his entrepreneurial spirit. Prince was his own man as a artist who wanted to control his own brand and all phases of the product that he produced. In classic form, after a dispute with Warner Brothers, he changed his name to a symbol (love) and became known as "the artist formerly known as Prince." This was an act reminiscence of a slave absconding from plantation life in the antebellum south or, in more modern times, a new convert to the Nation of Islam taking an X for his last name to reflect his lost sense of history and affirm his new sense of identity. A prime example of this would be "Free" from his 1982 release *1999*. On one level, the gospel infused ballad speaks of individual freedom, but beneath the surface this song has a collective dimension that could have been used during the Civil Rights Movement, much the same was as "Ain't Gone Let Nobody Turn Me Around" and other now classics songs of freedom. In this regard, Prince served as a trailblazer for other artists who could point to him as one who had much bigger designs than just making others rich. He challenged the status quo and, in the process, established a purple empire and called it Paisley Park.

The 1980s ushered the birth of MTV and a proliferation of artists who would continue to create indelible images for decades and define popular culture for years to come. Such a discussion about that epoch would not be complete unless Prince is included in the discussion. He was one of the movers and shakers during that time along with the King of Pop, Madonna, Whitney Houston, Cyndi Lauper, Boy George, Tina Turner, The Police, David Bowie, and even the reinvention of Bruce Springsteen. What separates Prince from the contemporaries is that he superseded the music. His sense of style and dress was an extension of his art, and one didn't

distract or overshadow the other. There was no separation between him and his persona, and later he was able to translate that into motion pictures, which permanently solidified his pop culture status. *Purple Rain* has gone from cult favorite to a cinema classic because Prince was able to build on all that came before him and refashion it into something new. To this notion of aesthetic difference, both Prince and the King of Pop offer disparate ends of the music video spectrum. While both integrated MTV around the same time and were geniuses in their own right, their style, dress, and aesthetics couldn't have been further apart. In fact, Jackson saw Prince as a rival and had Prince in mind when he penned his hit "Bad." Unfortunately, Prince not only rejected the offer, but myth has it that Prince mockingly rerecorded "Bad" and sent it to Jackson. As such, both men saw themselves as distinctly different. When the King of Pop was writing his 1988 autobiography, *Moonwalker*, he offered, "I don't like to be compared to Prince at all. I have proven myself since I was real little. It's not fair. He feels like I'm his opponent. I hope he changes because, boy, he's gonna get hurt. He's the type that might commit suicide or something…Prince is very competitive. He has been very mean and nasty to my family" (Young). While these comments never appeared in the autobiography, they surfaced on an audio that was transcribed by print and online magazines, including *Consequence of Sound.net*.

Even more, in his 2017 memoir, *Sing to Me*, LA Reid recounts that Jackson was angered by Prince always being hailed as great songwriter while he was never given credit as a great song writer. "I wrote 'Beat It.' I wrote 'Billie Jean,' but no one ever gives me credit." And, Reid continues with other anecdotes of how Jackson would invite him and Kenneth "Baby Face" Edmonds to his house and show him clips of Prince's *Under the Cherry Moon* and laugh at how bad it is. (Qwest7). Furthermore, there is the great story that Will.i.am told on *The Ellen DeGeneres Show* of how he took the King of Pop to one of Prince's after-hours shows during Prince's 2007 residency in Las Vegas. Will.i.am invited Jackson to the show, and Jackson responded, "I'd love to do that, but I don't know if I could do that. Prince and I always had been at odds with each other." Will.i.am reassured Jackson that everything will be alright if he decided to attend the show, and placed a few calls to Prince's team to set aside a VIP section for Jackson. During the show, Prince hopped off the stage while playing the bass guitar and walked to Jackson's area. Once he stopped right in front of Jackson, Prince never broke eye contact with the King of Pop while continuing to play the bass. Later, after the show, Will.i.am recounted that Jackson asked in a somewhat annoyed tone, "What's up with Prince playing the bass in my face?" None of this is to disparage either man but to show that African Americans have never been the monolith that white America has attempted to define them to be. What these two artists did for a predominantly white viewing audience was introduce them not only to the idea of diversity, but diversity within the African American community and how black not all black artists could be limited because of the music they chose to play.

Yet, early in his career, Prince was more interested in circumventing racial limitation rather than attacking it directly, in 1977 Prince told Warner Brothers A&R Lenny Waronker: "Don't make me black" (Staff). In other words, he didn't want to be pigeon-holed into one category or another which would in turn limit his marketability. Again Robert Hilburn from his 1982 *LA Times* piece, "The Renegade Prince" asserts that "Rock oriented radio stations avoid playing records by black artists, even if the records have a rock slant, because they feel rock fans associate any black artist these days with the dreaded disco. This black-out has only reinforced the rock audience's intolerance for contemporary black music." Prince's road manager at the

time added to Hilburn: "To me tracks like Little Red Corvette and Delirious are classic rock 'n' roll records, I just think stations are more concerned with what they think the image of an artist is that with what the music is. Those few rock stations that have played Prince have gotten good response. I don't know what the alternative is other than to keep doing what we're doing" (Hilburn 66).

While one would be hard pressed to find early in his career where Prince was engaged or outspoken on race, at least not explicitly, the subliminal seeds of the political, racial, and cultural change he'd planted in his work from 1978 – 1982 would bear fruit in such songs as "We March," from 1995's *The Gold Experience*, to commemorate the Million Man March and "Baltimore," from 2015's *HitnRun Phase Two*, in honor of Freddie Gray who died in custody of Baltimore police. At a concert for Gray, Prince proclaimed: "The next time I play here, I want to play in a stadium owned by y'all. The next time I stay here, I want to stay in a hotel owned by y'all." And later at the Grammys: "Albums still matter. Like books and black lives, albums still matter." Yet, even with this change later in his career, whether he wore an afro (which he did later) or donned a dashiki is irrelevant. Prince was a product of integration, which means that he was exposed to rock and roll, punk, new wave, disco, etc., and naturally he incorporated those elements into his own sound. But, make no mistake about it; his influences are deeply rooted in the black music, including Little Richard, Jimi Hendrix, James Brown, Earth, Wind, and Fire, Sly and the Family Stone, and Parliament Funkadelic. His mannerisms when playing guitar are homage to Jimi Hendrix and Carlos Santana, who often stated that he was not playing rock-n-roll but Afro-Cuban music, which is another connector of Prince to the African tradition. It is no accident or coincidence that before 1982, that Prince's primary musical exposure came from and through black radio. Black audience knew who he was long before "Little Red Corvette." But, for white America, he seemed to come from nowhere, which is indicative of the nature of white supremacy: You don't exist until we (white people) say you do, or your culture is not important until we (white people) co-opt it.

By 1982, Prince had made it to Top 40 radio, and the edges that were a part of his music had been rounded or smoothed to be more commercially acceptable. The music still possessed integrity, and I tuned in, turned on MTV, and watched him on the silver screen. Also, by 1982, I knew more about Prince than I cared to or had even hoped. Instead of the mysterious figure that intrigued me, I knew that he was from Minneapolis, leaned his dad was a musician, and that he had both a middle and last name. When you have intimate knowledge about those you admire, they become mere mortals instead. But it was the Prince years of 1978 – 1981 that met me in all the places I was looking for rebellion, restlessness, individuality, and self-expression and has stayed with me all these years. During those times, I didn't even know how to spell poet, let alone fiction writer; I did not read a book from cover to cover until I was in my mid-twenties. After I read Richard Wright's *Native Son*, I had a clear conception of which I was, then country in which I lived, and what I wanted to do. When I did start to write, all the artists, whether they were musicians, painters, dancers, or writers, who were uncompromisely courageous and relentlessly bold in their pursuit of self-expression, influenced my quest for truth and beauty through the written word. Prince Rogers Nelson was one of those artists.

As an artist, Prince's creative output from 1978 through 1984 is nothing short of phenomenal. The six albums released during those years are reminiscent of William Faulkner's

literary outburst from 1929 through 1936 or Toni Morrison's contribution to the American literary canon during the years of 1970 through 1987. By the late 1980s, my musical sensibilities were leaning towards the improvisation and polyrhythms of Thelonious Monk, Max Roach, Miles, Billie Holliday, Charles Mingus, and of course John Coltrane. And while my musical palette is eclectic, Jazz remains my primary staple of choice. But from time to time, I pull out my copy of *Dirty Mind* from 1980, blow dust mites from its vinyl, drop it on the turntable, and rediscover the young adult years of my life. Once again, I am lost in the grooves of a soundtrack no less brilliant than the day it shook the earth beneath my feet those many decades ago.

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The Purple Avatar: A Brief Discussion of Prince's Guitar Greatness
by Darryl Pete

The electric guitar is ethereal, powerful. The first commercially viable amplified guitar was invented by George Beauchamp, a musician, and Adolph Rickenbaker, an electrical engineer, in 1931 because an ordinary guitar just couldn't be heard in concert halls. With the subsequent evolution in technology, it became the instrument that's closest in mimicking the human voice. From Ike Turner's 1951 "Rocket 88," credited to Jackie Brenston and His Delta Cats and arguably the first rock and roll recording, to the neo soul of the Internet's "Under Control" (2015) or the rock, blues, and hip hop of Gary Clark Jr's "This Land" (2019), the guitar can be sublime or verbose. It can lyrically express a wide range of human emotion depending on who can command its gifts. Having said that, I don't know if I can fully quantify Prince's influence on my guitar playing. His shadow too big, talent too immense and intimidating frankly. At least, that's what I realized with my complete and utter failure to become him. Imitation is the sincerest form of flattery they say, and that's certainly true in music. You learn by imitating your favorite musicians; then, you move to jamming with other players which makes you better. Eventually, you'll discover who you are in relation to your expression musically. Prince certainly mined the depths of his own psyche and the larger cultural zeitgeist in creating music with the utmost authenticity. It felt human; it felt like him. The worst thing any artist can generate is contrivance. It definitely influenced me in the type of music I chose to play and create. I wanted it to represent my being.

Guitarists are usually judged by their tone and lyricism. These five players highlight the highest level of musicianship. Trained listeners usually hear if there is nuance and sensitivity to a player's phrasing as well as note choice in completing an idea. There isn't any doubt in classical master Andres Segovia. In "Concerto for Cello & Orchestra No. 6 in D," (2002) Segovia's virtuoso playing is melodic, sensitive, with a wide range of timbre and dexterity. He played with a combination of fingers and fingernails on nylon strings, achieving a louder, clearer tone which hadn't been done. Previously, other classical guitarist used cat gut strings and attacked with the tips of their fingers. His mastery was awe inspiring and impressively inventive. Next, Eddie Van Halen is the reason I picked up a guitar. He made it look fun and easy! He popularized the flash, tricks, and style of eighties rock virtuosity like "Eruption" off the self-titled *Van Halen* LP (1978). Trills, dive bombs, and legato (smooth and connected without break) solos, Van Halen's tone was different than other rock players at the time. He concocted what he called the "brown" sound, which is treble rolled off the top end with a scooped midrange and a round bottom. It was more pleasing to the ear than the typical high end "crunch" of other rockers. But, if we're talking smooth, one must consider Jazz legend Wes Montgomery. The lyricism of the blues and gospel with the improvisational genius of jazz, Montgomery achieved his tone playing with his thumb only minus a pick or plectrum. The thumb gives a nice roundness to his impeccably picked note runs. "Unit 7" on *Smokin' at the Half Note* (1965) is a perfect showcase of improvisational excellence. Finally, not much is known perhaps about the most infamous blues player in history, Robert Johnson. His guitar was a haunted voice accompanying him when he sang. As legend would have it, Johnson sold his soul to the devil at a Mississippi delta crossroad. "Hellhound on My Trail" (1937) miraculously sounds like two people performing, which doesn't hurt the myth. His tone was pure hands on wood, but it's the note choice, however, and style which make Johnson one of the most unique guitar players in history. His work is truly the foundation of all

popular music in America and the world. Prince, like all great musicians, melded these various styles into a personal idiom or signature like his mentors that stands on its own merit.

There are two quotes that come to mind when I consider Prince's influence. One is attributed to the great Miles Davis when he was asked for advice from a young musician he said, "Learn everything, then forget it." The other, from French romantic artist Eugene Delacroix who said, "What moves those of genius, what inspires their work is not new ideas, but their obsession with the idea that what has already been said is still not enough." Prince certainly embodies the idea of taking existing structures and crafting something new that's a unique expression. Artists with lesser gifts often are mere composites, a sum of influences, which summarily leads to mediocrity, a mimic to greater talent. This couldn't be further from the truth for an artist the caliber of Prince. I would suggest that Prince used what was generally in the vocabulary or toolbox of his ancestors and created music that was so sui generis as to be a finger print, a snow flake, or DNA. He achieved for what every artist strives—a singular voice.

I was thirteen when I was formally introduced to Princes music. It was on a school field trip to Memphis from my hometown of Jackson, MS. A homie had just purchased *Dirty Mind* (1980), Prince's third album the night before the trip. He played a thing that held recordings called a "cassette tape" on an archaic portable contraption we called a "boom box," on a loop the entire trip. Territorial with his equipment, no one else dared commandeer another tape or playlist; dude wasn't having it. It was phenomenal and annoying at the same time. The music was so different and such a contrast to the other, largely traditional rhythm and blues that dominated black radio at the time. But being kids and looking for anything new or different, we rocked it. Yet, the R&B coming from that tape was not pure; it seemed to have been conjured into a new something. Prince's music had elements of new wave (Blondie, Devo, the Police), funk (James Brown), rock (Chuck Berry, Little Richard, Bo Diddley), and soul (Sam Cooke, Otis Redding, Aretha Franklin) all rolled into a luxurious Al Sharpton perm sitting atop a tiny man with bikini bottoms and a trench coat! Adults were completely and justifiably mortified at the sight of this guy. Obviously, at thirteen, we didn't get all the inferences of the songs or even realize just how rebellious, how dangerous it was because, like most kids, we were horribly naive. Nevertheless, we fell in love with the whole aesthetic despite his effeminate sexuality. Any kid buying that album had to deal with resistance as there was rampant homophobia openly encouraged, particularly in the Bible Belt. It would be another two years before I learned what the songs "Head," "Sister," or "Party up" really meant (I was a little slow)! And, another six years before I picked up a guitar. Nevertheless, the seeds of disruption, fortunately or unfortunately, were sown.

The first song that inspired me after I started to learn my instrument was a paranoid, funk/pop song called "Lady Cab Driver" on *1999* (1982). Prince's mash up of influences, particularly James Brown 70's style funk and early 80's new wave shines quite brightly on this song. It is brilliant synth minimalism propelled by a simple Linn Drum pattern and a steady barrage of melodic yet staccato funk guitar. The lyrics, controversial at the time, begin with Prince asking the cabbie to take him for a ride, doesn't matter where and don't ask questions, just "put your foot on the gas, lets drive!" The pre-climax is Prince apparently having sex with said cab driver, punctuating every thrust spouting often contradictory miasma on the state of greed, his height, tourism, and loving women while in the middle of a consensual hate fuck? The actual

climax, though, is a searing distorted guitar solo followed by a coda of three overlaid guitars weaving the basis of the groove. It took me a while to realize it wasn't one guitar but three in counter punctual orchestration. Training the ear when it doesn't come naturally is difficult work, especially when you don't read music. Yet, the key to any great funk song is tension and release. It keeps the listener engaged. Like classic the James Brown riff on "Mother Popcorn" (1969), Prince's use of rhythmic 9^{th} chords on guitar with drums builds which keeps the listener dancing until the release of the bass and keys. Sheer passion made me sit there for six to eight hours daily learning those songs, riffs, and leads. Fortunately, I was a jobless college student so all I had was time. The hard work paid off though; I learned "Lady Cab Driver" well enough for my friends to say, "So, what song is that?"

By merging Brown with Chuck Berry, the blues and new wave, Prince showed that organic to genius was being a student that could master all that had come before him and personalize it. In an earlier fashion, Jimi Hendrix changed rock guitar. His live shows blended electric blues and 60s psychedelia with the use of fuzz pedals, phasing, and amplifier feedback, crafting a language for every song. His studio recordings were also revolutionary in that he pushed the boundaries of the guitar as an instrument, taking it sonically to new places. Hendrix was a visionary not only with sound but also with how he played guitar. His use of jazz voicings but moving around the fretboard with an R&B style was revolutionary. "The Wind Cries Mary" (1967), "Little Wing" 1967, and "Are You Experienced?" (1967), illustrate an orchestral comping where he plays the bass line and chord progression simultaneously while singing. Every player post Hendrix is doing a weak impression of this; his influence is that profound. Yet, Hendrix seems to have influenced Prince more in spirit than in technique. What Prince learned from Hendrix was not what specific notes and structures to play, but he inherited the freedom to play the way he desired. However, the way he dressed, wore his hair, and his showmanship were more Hendrix affectations. His phrasing and note choice differed a bit; thus, he was influenced by more melodic players, like Carlos Santana and Ernie Isley of the Isley Brothers. They were a good contrast to Hendrix's seemingly wild abandon. Santana and Isley both created very unique lead tones; Santana has a minimally distorted, throaty mid-range tone over Latin and Afro-Latin rhythms, such as in "Black Magic Woman" (1970) or "Evil Ways" (1969). His preferred language was using natural minor, Dorian and pentatonic minor scales. Isley has a high-end distorted tone that was electronically out of phase, meaning that the signals or waves are not in sync or not parallel, which sounded more like a synthesizer. The Isley's had a funky, sensual R&B/folk style that fit perfectly with lead guitar, such as "Voyage to Atlantis" (1977) or "Summer Breeze" (1974). Prince heroically managed a great synthesis of both styles. A good example is "Bambi," a straight up rock joint off his second LP *Princ***e** (1979). I went backwards for this one after I became a fan and discovered the rest of his catalogue. I was blown away. "Bambi" has all the earmarks of a rock song yet in the vein of Funkadelic's "Maggot Brain" (1971), "Super Stupid" (1971), or "Cosmic Slop" (1973). The guitars are heavy but filled with melodic hooks like in a pop song. The mostly male driven testosterone and aggressiveness of funk, rock, and hip hop appealed to me immediately in that the chords were unambiguous major or minor. The lyrics were also edgy; "Bambi" was apparently a lesbian or bi-sexual with Prince trying to convince her that, "Its better with a man." Even I knew at the time, that was a losing battle. Yet, the guitar solo at the climax was straight bombast though. It reminded me of Van Halen, Motley Crue, or the Scorpions to whom I was listening at the time. The lead break in "Panama" (1984) by Van Halen or the twin harmonized leads in "Big City Nights" (1984) by the

Scorpions seared my face off and made me as a black kid want that kind of power, that kind of presence to move people!

The early 80s was the beginning of MTV and the visual era of selling music. However, black artists at the start weren't included in the station's regular rotation so you rarely saw them. That is, until Michael Jackson.

> It took major prodding to get MTV to play "Billie Jean," the second track from Jackson's 1982 album *Thriller*. Released January 2, 1983, the single would go on to top the Billboard 100 chart for seven weeks, but Walter Yetnikoff, president of CBS Records Group, reportedly had to threaten to remove all other CBS videos from MTV before the network agree to air the video for "Billie Jean" (Nittle).

Subsequently, with the unprecedented success of *Thriller*, Jackson singlehandedly changed the music business and destroyed video segregation. *Thriller* was the nexus of having platinum and diamond selling albums. Industry heads didn't know anyone could sell that many records. As a result, video channels played anything and everything, obliterating strict genres. My friends and I were exposed to every kind and style of music. It was beautiful to be introduced to music from all around the world!

By1984 music videos were the most popular entertainment in the country. That year Prince exploded with *Purple Rain***,** an album which would ultimately be known as his masterpiece, making him a crossover star. The title track, "Purple Rain," would become his signature hit, but "Let's Go Crazy," in my view, was a milestone for one reason and one reason only—the solo and that one sustaining note at the end. Anyone who's ever played air guitar to any song on the radio usually makes the "stank" face when hitting that crucial note where rock god dreams exist. You imagine yourself onstage in front of thousands, moving them to tears or elation. Many have tried to actualize it in their songs, some have come close, but Prince, musically and visually, actually pulled it off! The song's Chuck Berry foundation in the vein of "Sweet Little Sixteen" (1958) or "Nadine" (1964) harkens to the late 50s and early 60s with rhythm and blues and country grooves. The opening organ and vocal are epic as well; "Dearly beloved, we are gathered here today to get thru this thing called life." And if you were watching the movie, he looks, moves, sings, and plays like the prototypical rock star!

Prince, along with being a perfectionist musically, was also savvy about marketing. Most artists let their companies handle those affairs, but he kept an iron fist on how he wanted to be presented. By the early eighties with the rise of video, his style, production, touring, and business began to fit neatly into a specific brand. He wisely made sure from the beginning that the visual and the audio created a narrative. The androgyny and theatrics, reminiscent of *Ziggy Stardust* era (1972) David Bowie, wasn't quite as over the top; yet, as an artist, he was just as mysterious. He gave few interviews and let the music speak for itself. This aloofness made fans thirsty to know who he was which simultaneously created a myth inside our imaginations. It was a shrewd and calculated business move compared to today, where artists are expected to share every aspect of their lives on social media. There's no mystery or mystique; everyone's soul is laid bare. You're behind the curtain with Oz, and the result is the art becomes another consumer product which is easily disposable. The other side of the argument, however, is that artists seem more

autonomous. They aren't as confined in how their music is presented or owned. Yet, for today's artists where almost everything is rooted almost exclusively in "reality," Prince used mystery to move beyond the limits of reality, to shape his own reality, inspiring others that they could shape their own reality, be it race, gender, or class, or whatever. It wasn't that Prince was detached from reality as some might claim. Songs—such as "Party Up" with its antiwar vibe, "Ronnie Talk to Russia, "America," "Sign 'O' the Times," and others—clearly show that Prince was well-informed of the sociopolitical reality. But, rather than accepting the given sociopolitical reality on its terms, Prince was determined to implode that reality through his sheer artistic will.

The only caveat is that this was the 80s, and fashion across the board was generally horrible. It was hilarious! We didn't at the time know specifically what was wrong, but we knew something wasn't right! Even though Prince was the coolest, it was a cool that required accepting an alternate reality of which many of us in the African-American community both liked and wondered about its practicability if not its possibility. He designed all his wardrobe which resembled Victorian age England, so he looked like the Count of Monte Cristo. But, the music was so good nobody cared. In fact, a new template of rock star, especially for kids of color, was born despite the frilly pirate shirt! That heavenly note climaxing at the end of "Let's go Crazy" seemed to sustain forever! The note wasn't just sustaining itself but the possibility of what black music could be, what it had been, what had been taken/stolen from it, and what it could reclaim. With that one note, Prince was standing in the intersection of time, holding the doors separating past, present, and future, seducing, demanding, and daring us all to cross the line to a better and more fulfilling place to be. Throughout the entirety of the album, the guitar effects are drenched in compression, chorus, wah-wah, and god knows what else. Prince was at the height of his powers, and his playing had matured. By then, every lead break ended in a neat pentatonic resolve. "Computer Blue" and "Darling Nikki" included on *Purple Rain* illustrate Prince's arranging skills on solos that are so precise that they could be charted like a classical piece.

That's when I decided to learn guitar. And, shortly after, that's where I decided to quit guitar, seven times! Along with the physicality of placing your hands on a guitar, which, by the way, hurts your fingers until you develop calluses, it was all struggle, especially if you didn't know you had any musical talent. The bar, though, was very high in my mind, and I went into it wanting to be the best. Prince was the amalgam of all of his influences, which happened to be the history of black music in America. It seemed impossible to digest it all, but I had one thing working for me; I wasn't that bright, and I was motivated. I plowed on, imitating Prince, Eddie Hazel (Parliament/Funkadelic), Jimi Hendrix, Ernie Isley (the Isley Brothers), Wes Montgomery, Nile Rogers (Chic), Jimmy Nolen (James Brown). I tried to learn as many songs and styles as I could. I never had a music or guitar teacher so I learned on my own, and the process was tediously slow until I found other people with whom to play. I absolutely loved every second! The most challenging aspect of starting guitar was just learning to hold it and finger the notes. I remember my wrist being in almost unbearable pain because you had to contort it a certain way that felt unnatural. But once I got comfortable, I learned a rudimentary blues line, and that was it. I was off and running! Every lick or riff I learned from a record spurned me to keep going, almost to the point of obsession. The first song I played with a group of musicians was Gladys Knight and the Pips' "Love Overboard" (1987).

Besides being a guitar god and world class musician, perhaps the most important reason I respect and admire Prince is because of his business acumen. There's a long list of black artists and performers dating to the beginning of the entertainment business that have been exploited in one way or another. From Little Richard getting half a penny on record royalties to much later TLC earning their company millions yet still owing money to their label, the horror stories are the norm in the music business. When my business partner, fellow musician Derrick "D-Mar" Martin, and I started a production company, we were well aware and decided to learn everything we could about contracts, management, production, distribution, and publishing. Our desire to educate ourselves as much as possible about the business was largely because of Prince. The idea of ownership is simple enough; yet, for most folk who enter the music profession, ownership of their art and of themselves hardly enters their minds. Most become seduced with the idea of fame and fortune, not learning the legalities and nuances of a business which requires the tenacity of a PhD. Prince eventually owned all his music as well as wrote and produced for other artists. The impact on my business outlook was huge. From the start, we had a hands-on approach, personally finalizing copyrights, producer contracts, and publishing contracts because we paid close attention to what had Prince endured years earlier.

In 1993 Prince waged a private and public campaign against Warner Brothers, an industry giant, because it owned and controlled his name as well as any music released under that name. He felt it was modern slavery so he changed his name to an unpronounceable symbol (☥). I and the small community of musicians in my area didn't think the name change was unusual because with Prince you were accustomed to the unorthodox. In retrospect, however, it dawned on us why he chose to rebel. After finally ending that contract, he reverted to his given name and became a self-owned and operated business. He eventually negotiated a deal to buy his master recordings with full ownership brokering limited contracts with various companies for distribution and booking. Additionally, he owned his own studio, Paisley Park, which began as a subsidiary of Warner Brothers. After ending his relationship with Warner Brothers, he retained full control and changed the company name to NPG records. This allowed him the freedom to produce his and other artists' albums at will. For instance, "Stevie Wonder, James Brown, Madonna, Aretha Franklin, Celine Dion, and R.E.M. all recorded there. In addition, a lot of famous acts used it for tour production rehearsals, such as the Beastie Boys, Hammer, Freddie Jackson, Stevie Ray Vaughn, Neil Young, Kool & The Gang, *The Muppets*, the Bee Gees, Barry Manilow, and Jeff Beck. Also, major film productions were shot on Paisley Park Studio's sound stage: *To Dream of Roses* (1990), *Old Explorers* (1990), *Drop Dead Fred* (1991), and *Grumpy Old Men* (1993) ("Paisley Park Studios"). The idea that he took ten million dollars personally to invest in his own business, studio, publishing, and record company is a very important lesson for those getting into the industry. It meant that the business, with or without his individual creative output, was self-sustaining. Fortunately for us, the information age provided no secrets, so we did the work of educating ourselves. Unfortunately, there's still an information gap between artists and the business, but all is not bleak. Before Prince there was Curtis Mayfield who owned his publishing, and now there are artists like Jay-Z and Chance the Rapper, who are in total control of their art and have true freedom. Prince's very public battles effectively put a dent, perhaps not an end, to bluesmen being exploited by the vulture capitalism of the music industry. To quote Prince, "A lot of people didn't know what I was doing, but it helped some people. I don't care what people think. I don't look at it as Us versus Them. I did. But you know The

Wizard of Oz? When they pull back the curtain and see what's going on? That's what's happened" (Lynskey).

Prince's vast creativity permeated every aspect of his personal and professional life, blurring lines most compartmentalize. Edna Gundersen of *USA Today* states in her 1991 television interview with *Omnibus* concerning her visit to Paisley Park, "He's up at ten in the morning. You never see Prince not being Prince" (1991). For him, being a musician, being an artist was life, not a convenient lifestyle. Everything else was a supplement or product of the art. This type of commitment to craft is what enabled him to become a major force in popular music. The electric guitar was his main tool of leading that revolution. As such, the lineage of black music is to respect it enough to learn it; disrespect it enough to make it your own. "Learn everything and forget it." Miles, of course, was talking about the basics of the language. For me that includes the art and the business of music. Only then can you have the conversation. Once that's mastered, you're only as limited as your imagination. There's always something new to learn. I've listed a myriad of ways why Prince has influenced me personally, and I'm still studying. He always seemed to be growing, learning, and evolving over the span of his career where most would rest on their laurels. He even grew past the questionable eighties fashion to less weird yet equally insane "My little pony" attire. Yet, returning to Delacroix, we are reminded, "What moves those of genius, what inspires their work is not new ideas, but their obsession with the idea that what has already been said is still not enough." With Prince there was certainly a wide mix of influences that made his music interesting, but there was no experimentation with odd time signatures or unorthodox arrangements; his music was generally straight forward and familiar like the music on which he was raised. He made his mark without reinventing the wheel, but he taught us there are infinite amounts of ways simply, with style, to craft one.

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Exploring Innuendos and Symbols in Selected Songs by the Artist Formerly Known as Prince

by Monica Flippin Wynn and Preselfannie E. Whitfield McDaniels

Abstract

Prince Rogers Nelson was an enigmatic entertainer. No two narratives on how someone interpreted or experienced his music would be the same. Our life trajectories are different, and when and where we became aware of this icon makes all the difference in how we sense this musical expedition. It is not a simple put-on-your-headphones opportunity, and no matter how many times you have heard the music and revisited the lyrics, it can be different each time. The innuendos and symbols that are so naturally and cleverly intertwined into the lyrics correlate with our personal journeys. It is musicology at its best. Prince's music, the lyrics, and the symbols provide different impressions. His lyrics tackle taboo subjects, melodies evoke or return memories, beats keep us moving, and ideas pierce our souls. The music is pervasive. There is a truth and, a self-discovery factor if you will, that operates within the words and notes of his music. His truth, interspersed among the innuendos and the symbols, seemed to give permission to discuss what feels real, what it really means to hurt, what makes one afraid, how to explore and inhabit our sexual selves, what we respect, experiencing love and pain, showing understanding and tolerance. His music was a voice of expression about life and choices not judgments and recriminations. And during a time where self-love is at a minimum and hate and intolerance are on the rise, a re-introduction to a lyricist who demonstrated real-life passions and agonies through the storytelling in his music is what we might need right now.

Keywords: Prince, expressive music and lyrics, Prince's songs and lyrics, symbols

Introduction: Collaborating on Lived Experiences (Flippin Wynn)

Prince Rogers Nelson was such an enigmatic entertainer that no two narratives on how someone interpreted or experienced his music would be the same. Our life trajectories are different, and when and where we became aware of this icon makes all the difference in how we sense this musical expedition. It is not a simple put-on-your-headphones opportunity, and no matter how many times you have heard the music and revisited the lyrics, it can be different each time. The allusions and symbols that are so naturally and cleverly intertwined into the lyrics correlate with our personal journeys. It is musicology at its best. As such, I have been a student for many years, and I remain eager and focused on the music and symbols, ready to hear something that I previously missed or making a new connection and a different understanding. As you move forward through your life, Prince's music, the lyrics and the symbols, provide a different impression than you may have had before. The music is pervasive.

I was excited to work with my colleague on a Prince article. We experience life through different lenses, and her revelations would define a different portrayal. The impressions and diverse perspectives would definitely indicate that Prince was an everyman's artist. Yes, he was a celebrity and walked in that world, but his music was so tantalizing and real because it worked for everybody. I have lived my entire adult life with Prince somehow narrating the stories that I have lived. In fact, I venture to say that I am a Prince connoisseur. However, I recognize that a

great artist, like Prince, who was so revered, had legions of fans across the globe who understood and interpreted his music individually and felt the lyrics through their own lived experiences. As Kymberly Keeton stated in her article, "The Electric Life of Prince Rogers Nelson," "There will never be another artist that captivated my soul, allowing me the opportunity to relish in my own independence—no explanations needed" (532).

My preparation included returning and experiencing some of the music but not on YouTube or on one of the songshare sites. No, I am a realist, and I needed to listen to "Soft and Wet" as I had heard it the first time—music pouring from speakers in my room. I discovered a used 'vinyl' store in my neighborhood and found a few of my favorites nestled carefully in the stacked memories. What I could not find, I ordered from online so I could listen for real, the way his earlier songs were made and meant to be felt and experienced.

Although, Prince was extremely private, there is much written about the Prince, the celebrity, and the man, as would be expected. Who was this bejeweled artist, in the stylish pumps, who was vogue-ing before it became a thing? There are so many questions about who he was and how he lived. Yet, I am reminded, as "I Would Die for You" explodes in my headphones at the gym, that it is the music that draws us; it is the lyrics that rope us and will not release. It is the language and the symbols he taunts us with a need for clarification of the mystification and personification that have made us life-long fans even after his death. This article will help us remember, briefly, that it has always been about the music—it has always been a sign of the times. It has been the innuendos and symbols and the double-talk that keeps us returning for more. Music has and will always be a means to opening Pandora's Box for reflection. Prince talked openly about sex, for instance, the feel good and the possible consequences, but it provided fodder for discussion. He made it plausible, yes, by utilizing innuendoes and symbols. But, you had to take time with his music, and you had to listen and expose your mind to the new perceptions and ideas, even if it did not initially resonate with your own experiences. His music has been a forerunner to current lyricists, who debate current world conditions and pains through their songs. One artist comes to mind, Kendrick Lamar; although he covers a different music type, he spins real-time narratives on loving, race, and hate. His popularity suggests that the music, the art of telling stories though our songs, continues to be a balm for our lives. I am certain that he designed the path for the current travelers of song.

Innuendos of Sexuality and Relationships (Flippin Wynn)

For You (1978) introduced a pure, still percolating Prince Rogers Nelson sound. In fact, Brian Josephs suggests that his first album was an "inauspicious start" for this talented teenager, and it would take several more attempts before he would be considered a musical "prodigy." This effervescent and pubescent song documents a teenaged Prince as the composer, arranger, and producer. Anyone paying attention knew this was just the beginning for this young wunderkind. Listening to the opening verse, the music and the timing made the lyrics, co-written by Chris Moon, seem play-like, the innuendos camouflaged the intent, but, in fact, the song was suggestive and indecent, and explicit: "Hey, lover, I got a sugarcane/ That I want to lose in you/ Baby can you stand the pain/ Hey, lover, sugar don't you see?" Ken Tucker of *Rolling Stone* indicated that anyone listening to the lyrics might have believed that Prince's lover had gotten caught in a rain shower instead of the intended sexual reference. Those who were not clued into

Prince's figurative frequency were none the wiser on the implication. That has always been one of the joys of listening and knowing Prince's music—being able to decipher the nuggets wrapped in the symphony of sound: "We'd be so lost, in our mouths, the best, I feel it every day (every way)/ You feel so wrong, be alone, if you just follow somebody someday." As with "Soft and Wet" and other songs yet to come, C. Liegh McInnis suggested Prince was able to conjure these vivid images but managed not to lose sensitivity or respect for the act or discussion (169). Prince was still a teenager when he co-wrote this song. And his maturity in songwriting was not quite there yet, but his play on words—making something so risqué and devious sound like 'eating cotton candy'—was just the beginning of our journey. It was just beginning.

Prince opened the door to subjects that had once been taboo, and definitely forbidden to a gilded parochial school girl like myself. My friends and I were curious about things that were discussed in hush tones, so this song introduced lingo of descriptions and gave way to fantasies that we believed were sinful and unrighteous, but we somehow craved. Listening to the song led to candid discussions amongst my girlfriends and me on everything sex. We began to lower our inhibitions throughout the listening experience and looked forward with eagerness for our own initial sexual escapades. The songs diminished some of the fear and the shamefulness sometimes associated with thinking about the joys of sex, without being demeaning or "nasty." Often, there is not any place or person who will explain the rituals and the passions of sex, and music and artistry have the opportunity to make every day experiences tangible. I don't think I knew in the beginning what Prince meant initially when he referred to his sugarcane, but through hours of listening and exploration alone and with my girls, I was prepared when the schoolhouse lothario offered me a taste. His music was a teacher for life.

"I Want to Be Your Lover," *Prince*, 1979

The *Prince* album dashed onto the music scene in 1979, just two weeks after the other musical genius of an era, Michael Jackson, released his solo masterpiece *Off the Wall*. "I Wanna Be Your Lover" was the certifiable hit that set Prince assail. It went to number one. You now understood when listening to this song that Prince was a wordsmith and lyrical genius in how the words he selected flowed together, while pushing the line, on plain, raw uninhibited sex. While the first verse starts average, what you would expect in one of those pleading, begging, gimme sum, set-up songs: "Ain't got no money/ I ain't like those other guys you hang around/ It's kinda funny/ But they always seem to let you down/ And I get discouraged/ 'Cause I never see you anymore/ And I need your love, babe/ That's all I'm living for, yeah." No, it was the refrain that mesmerized listeners, who could not quite understand what they had heard, danced to, and bobbed to; the consuming beat as Prince set us up again, people were loving how he could describe so succinctly the passion of soliciting this sex act, the act of and including the partner in the pleasure: "I want to be your lover/ I want to be the only one that makes you come, running/ I want to be your lover/ I want to turn you on, turn you out/ All night long, make you shout/ Oh, lover, yeah!/ I want to be the only one you come for." With the combination of the high pitched voice, the pulsating beat, and the breathless invitation: "I want to be the only one you come for," the listener could be caught in an orgasmic experience. Again, as noted before, how the words are arranged and the pauses in the track did allow each listener to hear with different explanations, for each listener. Prince, continued to press the button. Even today with our propensity to utilize the Internet or social media for everything, it is important to defrock the

negative energy associated with sex and its many pleasures. The article**,** "We Need to Talk about Sex," found in the *State Press* suggests that sex should be discussed freely and without prejudice, regardless of your preferences or your choices. Failing to do so invokes a society that lacks acceptance of difference which can lead to confusion and hostility and even violence for people who practice various ways to live and love. Prince unwrapped subjects which were taboo and made them less intimidating and more unfeigned. He often utilized his platform to make us less afraid and more tolerant. And, after cracking the door to full human exploration, he continued to push the button by incorporating sex, race, and gender in his music.

"If I Was Your Girlfriend," *Sign O' the Times*, 1987

In the album, *Sign O' the Times*, Prince tackled gender differences in the penetrating "If I Was Your Girlfriend," similar to what has been attempted in other genres, for instance with the bestselling book, *Men Are from Mars, Women Are from Venus*, however, maybe not as insightful or thumping as he manages to do in this song: "If I was your girlfriend, would you remember/ To tell me all the things you forgot when I was your man?/ Hey hey, when I was your man." Steve Huey writes that Prince's song is, "a playful yet profound attempt to bridge gender differences." Because the song demands that listeners actually listen attentively and contemplate each word, it did not become a big hit in the United States as the general audience seemed to miss the wordplay and was not able to get their minds beyond the notion of a man in makeup and heels singing "If I was your girlfriend" as a metaphor for role reversal[26]. Yet, on the same album, there are three songs among the top 50 on the charts, but "If I Was Your Girlfriend" was not one of them. The lyrics suggest a more intimate and trustful experience had by women in their relationships, than what he has experienced. Often, women allow themselves to demonstrate their feelings in their relationships, which leads to an environment where each individual feels safe, loved, and respected. In the past, our communication styles are regulated based on our gender and biological sex. Often, that clouds our judgment, and we are communication with a style, not a person, with an expectation and not real-time experiences. As we have begun to explore the notion of gender and its influences on how we live our lives, maybe men and women will soon communicate as individuals, basing communications and expectations on real experiences and not assumed bias and behavior. What Prince wanted was a true and honest, loving and expressive relationship that seemed only to be possible if he were experiencing it through the lens of a different gender and not himself. He wanted to expand the discussions on how we communicate which should be based on what we give to the opportunity and not on gender and sexual prescribed expectations.

"Little Red Corvette," *1999*, 1982

[26] Interestingly, over the years the song has become a diehard fan favorite, especially in the African-American community as it seems that, over time, as Prince's listeners matured and realized what he was doing lyrically, they were able to decipher the message of a man recognizing the conundrum of gendered communication and working to remove the wall that separates the male speaker from his female partner. Thus, years later Beyoncé releases "If I Were a Boy," which owes its entire being to "If I Was Your Girlfriend."

With the *1999* album, Prince got a billboard hot 100 bona fide pop song, "Little Red Corvette," according to *Slate* journalist Jack Hamilton. The album continued the pattern of songs that praise and invite sex, with this song being one of the most popular songs, in the current era, about casual sex and condoms. What is quite amazing is how the same person who wrote so pointedly about single romps could also be the same artist who wanted to discuss gender differences and issues in relationships, which indicates how prolific an artist he was. Some critics suggest this song is about more than a casual hook-up (Hamilton). The timing of the song was smack dab in the middle of the AIDS epidemic, and there was a cautionary tone through the lyrics of this song: "Guess I must be dumb/ 'Cause you had a pocket full of horses/ Trojan and some of them used/ But it was Saturday night/ I guess that makes it all right/ And you say what have I got to lose? /And honey I say." Interestingly enough, there are not that many songs that combine the idea of having sex but making sure all is safe and secure. Inserted in the easy to dance to and rap anthem, "Ain't nothing but a G-thang baby," which narrates "And before me dig a B---, I have to find a contraceptive you never know how she could be earnin' her man and learning' her man—and at the same time burning her ma' her man." Initially, this is subtle, but it sells the idea that responsibility and good times go hand and hand and sends a real-time message about the consequences of going it alone. "Lay it Down," by Lloyd, makes the safety net part of the process as he exclaims "Ima put the jimmy on and rock that body right." With the preponderance of sexually transmitted diseases on the rise, encouraging people to do this first is a positive for all communities. In "Little Red Corvette," Prince bemoans about slowing down or "you gonna run your body right into the ground," a one-two admonition of making sure you use some protection and be careful out there. Still, the message is clear in "Move over baby, Give me the Keys, I'm gonna try to tame your little red love machine."

Remembering when the news came that Prince Rogers Nelson had passed, I was not surprised but surprised to see people of all walks of life, ethnicities, ages, and lifestyles weeping unashamedly at the news. I think some of it is because he could be understood and felt so passionately by so many people because he phrased his songs and created characters for us to envision and translate to our own real-time examples... It was much easier to think of a woman's vagina as a 'red Corvette' or in someone's experience it was a Dodge, but we could relate to it easier, and it made it okay. For instance, his music showed relevancy for an 18 year-old who is just coming into the fold and to the 60 year old who remembers when he was driving the Corvette several times a day. Prince provided the colors and the paint, and each individual can create one's own tapestry. You can find this in his music throughout his library of treasures. It is a vast library built on the history of popular music, such as Chuck Berry's "Maybellene" (1955), which documents the manner in which men had always referred to their automobiles as "she" and that by 1982 there had been a well-established American metaphor for which women could represent cars and cars could represent women. To that end, Prince's use of this trope signals his understanding of Americana in a way that enabled him to create imagery that simultaneously borrows from, reaffirms, and refashions a meaning that allows him to titillate listeners while making a socio-political statement about the very thing that titillates them. That speaks to how Prince's music was for everyman, that innuendo is not always recognized, and that anyone who listens to Prince's music can have a solitary experience that is different from the crowd.

"Sometimes it Snows in April," *Parade*, 1986

Prince's catalog is filled with songs that none except his diehard fans would know anything about them, and one of those songs is "Sometimes It Snows in April." The first thing you notice is the calmness and the melancholy of the music and the vocal stylings. According to *Prince Vault.com*, this song was first recorded April 21, 1985, which would be 31 years to the day of Prince's transition. The first few bars include Prince and members of his band doing a slow, eerie hum for the introduction, no pumping drums, snappy intros, or nothing that would suggest that the song is anything but ordinary, but, in fact, that is the selling point of this song. It is not flashy, it is not a big production, and it does not have an obvious active message. It depicts sorrow and loss in a real and "every person way." One reviewer, Andrea Battleground, stated that Prince buried one of his most touching songs, in a terrible movie that no one would see and, thus, not experience this song: "Tracy died soon after a long fought civil war/ Just after I wiped away his last tear/ I guess he's better off than he was before/ A whole lot better off than the fools he left here/ I used to cry for Tracy cause he was my only friend/ Those kind of cars don't pass you every day/ I used to cry for Tracy cause I want to see him again/ But sometimes, sometimes life ain't always the way."

The first and second verses are not lyrical standouts, but tell a simple story of sadness and loss: "He used to say so strong unafraid to die/ Unafraid of the death that left me hypnotized." But when he sings these lines in the second verse, it is a wailing of sorts, when one is touched by a memory that makes these lyrics more impactful. But after the first verse, the chorus liberates. It delivers the sentiment of the relationship and the loss: "Sometimes it snows in April/ Sometimes I feel so bad/ Sometimes I wish that life was never ending/ And all good things, they say, never last." It is a simple refrain, wrapped in a pure melody that crescendos with a simple harmony and a single piano center. It is emotionally crushing, and one of Prince's most beautiful and unpretentious songs. By the time Prince arrives at this moment, the little sexual nymph-child has become a romantic man, moving from the thrills of the body to the fulfillment of the soul. What becomes clear, just through the movement of these songs, is that, from day one, Prince was not merely concerned about the body but concerned about how the body is a vehicle for the mind, spirit, and soul and concerned about crafting a career that enabled him, as he evolved as an artist and as a person, to recognize, acknowledge, and pursue that "every man" journey of reconciling/making peace with the tension between the flesh and the spirit to show listeners that the most fulfilled life is a life in which one realizes that learning the body is just the first step to learning the full self, which leads to communing with the higher realm of existence.

Symbols of Spirituality and Identity (McDaniels)

This section contains mostly selected songs by Prince once he begins his collaboration with the New Power Generation. It also signals a division in his musical career of his number of selections which focus less on sexuality and more on spirituality and one's understanding of self-identity as it relates to belief systems. Herein, six songs are selected as examples and examined for their lasting and sometimes piercing symbolism that showcase Prince as the artist-poet, a master of poetic device capable of causing listeners to consider and reconsider their own spiritual journeys, especially whether or not they are fulfilling their responsibility to make the earth better than how it was given to them.

"Thieves in the Temple," *Graffiti Bridge*, 1990

Written for the *Graffiti Bridge* movie soundtrack, "Thieves in the Temple" (1990) is part of a musical screenplay plotline. According to C. Liegh McInnis, the song marks the film's main character's (Kid, portrayed by Prince himself) "moment of clarity" (327). Here, the "thieves" symbolize the music industry executives, about which McInnis also writes the following: "Translated—commercial, money, grubbing artists and businessmen…have entered into the Kid's private sanctuary, the arena of music…and stolen his love, his right to make the music of his heart… (327). As in many of Prince's songs, "Love" symbolizes saving grace or protection from the thieves; love can "come quick" and "come save me" from the thieves in the temple, in the music "sanctuary."

> Love come quick/ Love come in a hurry/ There are thieves in the temple tonight/ They don't care where they kick/ Just as long as they hurt you/ There are thieves in the temple tonight/ Love if you're there come save me/ From all this cold despair/ I can hang when you're around/ But I'll surely die/ If you're not there/ Love come quick/ Love come in a hurry/ There are thieves in the temple tonight/ I feel like I'm looking for my soul (Soul)/ Like a poor man looking for gold (Gold)/ There are thieves in the temple tonight"

A topical analysis of the film *Graffiti Bridge* leads the viewer to take a close look at suicide, drug abuse, and violent crime, especially among the youth, and how "love," the "saving" kind of love, can have a positive impact on eradicating societal ills. Teaching youth to love themselves and others can lead to creating a perspective that disallows and disapproves actions that cause harm to self and others (Mier and Ladney 1006). The more that love is understood and practiced, the more society benefits. As Christians, we are taught that we should emulate Christ's "agape" or essential unconditional love for others. If the world could embrace this concept and practice this teaching, societal ills would truly be eradicated.

"Diamonds and Pearls," *Diamonds and Pearls*, 1991

One of Prince's most commercially appealing songs (and albums), "Diamonds and Pearls" continues Prince's discourse on the importance of love. Just as in "Thieves in the Temple," "love," in "Diamonds and Pearls," also symbolizes protection and safety from, even escape from, the "diamonds and pearls" which symbolize societal materialism. The song also houses the innuendo that diamonds and pearls will not equate to being "happy," even if a boy or a girl had all of the diamonds and pearls in "the world": "I am here for you/ Love is meant for two/ Now tell me what you're gonna do/ If I gave you diamonds and pearls/ Would you be a happy boy or a girl/ If I could I would give you the world/ But all I can do is just offer you my love." The love and happiness presented in the song engages serious societal subjects. Issues, such as domestic abuse and juvenile delinquency, which affect youth from dysfunctional homes, are directly impacted (and greatly cancelled) by healthy, long-lasting loving relationships. Healthy love relationships also lead to healthier lives, especially for men, who have been proven to maintain healthier lifestyles when involved in lasting romances (Courtney). Why is the example of men so important to illustrating this concept? Well, we must remember that men are stereotypically perceived as being the individuals least likely to display their emotions openly, so the benefit for them is thought to be even greater, thereby serving as proof of just how powerful love can be in eliminating its negative oppositions.

"Chaos and Disorder," *Chaos and Disorder*, 1996

In title track "Chaos and Disorder," the "no-name reporter" symbolizes the artist, whose "new camcorder" symbolizes a reflective mirror via which society sees itself without filters. McInnis writes that "Chaos and Disorder" presents a persona who is "concerned with human direction and the journey to a better place" and sees the artist as one whose job is "to turn the camera on the society so that it is forced to see its detrimental ways" (485). Prince asserts: "I'm just a no-name reporter/ I wish I had nothing to say/ Looking through my new camcorder Trying to find a crime that pays/ I get hit by mortars, everywhere I go I'm loitering/ Chaos and disorder ruining my world today." Like artists John Legend, Bruce Springsteen, Kendrick Lamar, and Childish Gambino, Prince was an artist unafraid to discuss social issues in his lyrics. In fact, he was a musical artist, who put his lyrical abilities to good use by challenging his listeners to examine what ails society on a daily basis, such as gun violence and hate crimes. And, of course, his musical artistry and soulful style created an array of unforgettable performances that remain lasting for his faithful listeners.

"Dinner with Delores," *Chaos and Disorder*, 1996

A *Rolling Stone* staff writer chronicles Prince's song "Dinner with Delores" in the following:

> The only single to be released from The Artist 4merly Known as Prince's 18th studio album, "Dinner With Delores," premiered online at a special *Chaos and Disorder* website — the first of his songs to debut digitally …The titular Delores is a nymphomaniac, which, amazingly, turns the once sex-crazy singer *off*. At song's end, he sings, "Damn, Delores, pick another subject please." This song is a favorite among Prince aficionados: Questlove told the *Guardian* that, "'Dinner with Dolores' has the best ending and fade in postmodern black pop history."

Like some critics, I agree that the "Dinner" with Delores symbolizes Prince's last supper (or contracted album) with Warner Brothers, and the sex-crazed "whore," Delores, represents the money-hungry record company (Deriso; McInnis, 485-6). Prince cuts ties with the company after this album and frees himself from what he calls the slavery of his original Warner Bros. contract: "'When you stop a man from dreaming, he becomes a slave. That's where I was. I don't own Prince's music. If you don't own your masters, your master owns you'" (quoted in Deriso). The abrupt end to the song, "No more/That's the end," signifies the end of the contractual relationship and the artist's disdain for what the relationship had become, a broken relationship, just like Delores's broken "bell." By the song's end, Prince is able to wash himself of the "sin" that the "dinner" had become.

> Dinner with Delores/ Must be some kind of sin/ Like a Brontosaurus/ She was packin' it in/ The first night we dined/ And by the next time/ This girl was eatin' all but the tip/ And by the stroke of midnight/ She wanted some more (more)/ Showin' dirty movies\ Like some kind of whore/ But she was wastin' her time/ Cause there wasn't a line/ That would

> make me come 'round her door/ Dinner with Delores/ Must be some kind of sin/ Her bell's just a-broken (bell's just broken)/ Since 1984

Prince's growth as an artist manifests itself both spiritually and artistically, thereby providing him with a global platform to tackle serious issues. His educational experience in the music industry provides him with the wisdom needed to know when to escape from the controlling record label into his own economic growth. Utilizing his "bought sense" (he pays as a slave to the label first, then exercises his right to control his own price), his success becomes legendary as a true independent artist. He throws off economic industry chains, and becomes an example for young up and coming artists who might follow his example of re-claiming his image and establishing his freedom.

"The Holy River," *Emancipation*, 1996

Unlike the hidden symbols in "Dinner with Delores," the symbolic is clear and simple in "The Holy River." Drowning in "the holy river" symbolizes one's opportunity to be cleansed of one's sins, fears, and pain and truly experience and be strengthened by the love of God/Jesus, to experience being purely "happy." Drowning in "the holy river" represents the opportunity to "find the answers," as the "truth will be told" and heard.

> Let's go down to the holy river/ If we drown then we'll be delivered/ You can still see the picture upon the wall/ One eye staring at nothing at all/ The other one trying to focus through all your tears/ You can try and try, but there's nothing to hide/ You can't run from yourself and what's inside/ You got to find the answers to the questions that you most fear/ …And then it hit you like a fist on a wall/ Who gave you life when there was none at all?/ Who gave the sun permission to rise up every day? (Ooh, oh yes)/ Let me tell it (Go on)/ If you ask God to love you longer/ Every breath you take will make you stronger/ Keeping you happy (happy) and proud to call His name/ (Go on and say it)/ Jesus (Jesus)/ And over and over you ask your soul/ Why did you come down to a world so cold?/ And the voice inside said tonight the truth will be told/ And this time I was listening, hear me

This moment of spiritual/religious clarity represents growth from an artist who was always working within the confines of the Judeo-Christian framework but was now rooting his work firmly and undeniably within Christianity. While, of course, this is certainly a promotion of those Christian values, this is also an example of the artist that continues to produce alluring work because one is always growing, seeking to become better at life while hoping that one's artistry reflects that search and growth. To this end, Prince must be celebrated for using his art as an example of what it means to display that search and growth publically as a way to inspire others to do so as well.

"Musicology," *Musicology*, 2004

"Musicology" is considered an ode of sorts to Funk music, the music of "back in the day" and "old-school joints"; and the album *Musicology* is a salute to "Old School" music and musicians. Prince catalogs musicians, such as Earth, Wind, and Fire, James Brown, Sly and the

Family Stone, Chuck D, and Jam Master Jay, as the "true funk soldiers." In the lines of the song, "Musicology" symbolizes "God's gift" of music sensibility or the lasting impact Prince has had on the industry and his listeners. McInnis writes the following:

> So the title of the song, "Musicology," is appropriate because Prince is teaching. By embracing the term "musicology," Prince is embracing what it means to be an elder or a griot. This is an important step in the evolution of a man/artist who is all about evolving, showing that he can embrace aging as a sign of wisdom and not just as getting old or dated. (584)

Prince certifies, signifies, and/or symbolizes that musical wisdom with his use of "PhD" in the lines of the song.

> Call it what you like,/ I'm gonna call it how it be,/ This is just another one of God's gifts,/ Musicology!/ Got to keep that party movin',/ Just like I told you./ Kick the old-school joints,/ For the true funk soldiers./ Musicology!/ Wish I had a dollar,/ For every time you say,/ "Don't you miss the feeling,/ Music gave ya back in the day?"/ Let's groove, September, Earth, Wind and Fire./ Hot Pants by James,/ Sly's gonna take you higher./ …If it ain't Chuck D,/ Or Jam Master Jay,/ Know what?/ They're losin'./ Cause we got a PhD in/ Advanced Body Movin'/ Keep the party movin'…

Yes, Prince, the artist who slammed the musical genre of rap in his 1988 song "Dead on It," steps forward in personal maturity and authentic embrace in "Musicology" to acknowledge the importance of all the musical griots and significant elders of Black music, regardless of differences in music genre. His example provides a blueprint for what is needed in political, familial, and social arenas in the Black communities today, a bridge from one generation to the next which symbolizes the importance of cultural, social, and political dissemination.

Conclusion: A Meshing of Ideas and Interpretations (McDaniels)

It is obvious from our collaborative exercise of exploring innuendos and symbols in the selected song lyrics of Prince that, as we view the world differently, we also see Prince via different prisms, different perspectives, and different personal experiences. Simultaneously, though, we see Prince as a wordsmith, a lyricist, a griot, a poet, a genius, whose body of work spans the decades of our lives like good friends do, staying with you and reminding you of the ebbs and flows on life's different phases. His lyrics tackle taboo subjects, melodies evoke memories, beats keep us moving, and ideas pierce our souls. Together, we acknowledge these things. Well-crafted artists, such as Prince, impact the ability of a society to advance by providing progressive ideas, reflect on poor decisions presented or critiqued in the art, and heal from negative occurrences that enable people to proceed into a constructive future.

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A New Historicist Critique of Prince's "America"
by Gabrielle Anderson

Prince Rogers Nelson, better known as Prince, is an American musician, singer, songwriter, and icon. He is more popularly known for songs, such as "Little Red Corvette" and "Purple Rain," but he is equally well-known for his musical talents, which includes the ability to play various instruments, his elaborate and impressive performances, and his adamancy to present himself as an artist and performer, not a celebrity or "slave" to the entertainment industry. Prince changed a generation, and his contribution to music continues to affect generations to come, nationally and internationally. Even with his recent death, Prince still influences the world today. Many of his songs and his opinions provide the opportunity for a New Historicist critique of current society. According to Dr. Michael Delahoyde, "New Historicism seeks to find meaning in a text by considering the work within the framework of the prevailing ideas and assumptions of its historical era." Essentially, New Historicism asserts that history is not only a statement of past events but a framing or acting agent in current affairs of which people must be aware. With much of his music, Prince concerned himself with what was occurring around him. His song, "America," for example, from the 1985 album, *Around the World in a Day*, seems strictly patriotic, but, when examined from a New Historicist view, it provides an even deeper meaning to what patriotism in America means to different American citizens, providing insight to understanding what it is means to be patriotic, which is critical today in an America that is divided along race and class lines with each person and group grappling to define what is best for the country. This can especially be seen in the polarizing responses to San Francisco 49ers Quarterback Kolin Kaepernick's kneeling during the playing of the National Anthem before games as his way to protest the injustices suffered by people of color. At the core of this divide is the question of what defines or constitutes patriotism. As such, "America" becomes a work that can be used to explore this discourse of patriotism. Divided into three separate verses, the first involving the aristocrats, the second involving a minimum-wage woman, and the third involving a young student, Prince examines the lives of Americans who struggle with patriotism and what the ideals of America are supposed to be. By applying a New Historicist approach, "America" listeners are better able to understand that for Prince patriotism is not a blind love for one's country but that true patriotism demands that citizens have the courage to acknowledge the flaws or failures of one's country so that they can be improved. Therefore, following Prince's lead, in 2016, American citizens can dare to be more brave and bold in their critique of the continuing ills of American racism and economic exploitation, which will enable the country finally to address racism in a tangible manner that will lessen the killing of unarmed black people by police offers while creating effective policy to lessen poverty, which can also led to higher employment for African Americans and decrease issues of drug trade and gang violence rooted in the need of so many who turn to gangs to fulfill the economic voids of their lives.

Prince begins 'America" with, "Yeah/Peace!," pronouncing "peace" in a manner that announces that it will provide different views of what it means to live in America. Known as the land of the free and home of the brave, to those who only have exposure to American culture through pop culture and media outlets, some believe that America is a peaceful, wealthy country. Yet, by using the word, "peace," in such an aggressive, if not angry, tone, Prince is providing his listeners with a contradicting theme; peace is one of the most important American ideals, but it is

one that America does not seem to follow, especially when engaging its poorest and most disenfranchised citizens. After yelling "peace," Prince then demonstrates the opposite of peace by exposing the battles that various American citizens fight daily. The first verse focuses on those of the upper strata of American society, essentially, the crème de la crème of America. Their main focus is on business, as stated by Prince, "Aristocrats on a mountain climb/Making money, losing time" ("America"). The main purpose, or goal rather, of these American aristocrats is to make money and keep control. If the money and control is lost, then they will become like everyone else. Prince better describes this potential fall in the next lines of the verse: "Communism is just a word/ But if the government turn over/ It'll be the only word that's heard" ("America"). Communism is essentially a society in which all property available is owned by the community and each person works and receives goods based on their needs and skills. Communism is also the complete opposite of what America strives to be, which is a democratic republic. Additionally, America has always presented communism as an evil because it prohibits the ability of individuals to change their own circumstance through diligence because of the control of the national system by the few in government al power. Yet, Prince seems to be asserting that American democracy is not much better as the bulk of American wealth is control by the few at the top who then limit the ability to the masses to change their own circumstance. According to Barry, "New historicist essays always themselves constitute another remaking, another permutation of the past, as the play or poem under discussion is juxtaposed with a chosen document, so that a new entity is formed" (175). Although, not a new historicist essay, Prince is still creating a new retelling of the past. Through his retelling, Prince is advising the country that the greatest fear or threat will not come from beyond the country's borders but from within the country's borders. Thus, for Prince, the greatest threat of America is communism invading American boarders but American monopoly capitalism causing an implosion of America's economic system. This revisioning of America is designed by Prince to inspire citizens to pay more attention to what the American government and the most powerful are doing so they can identify when laws and actions are being committed by their own leaders to limit their own freedom, such as the Patriot Act, which essentially denies a right to privacy for anyone, or the "Stand Your Ground" law that allowed George Zimmerman to kill an unarmed black teenager merely because class privilege.

In the second verse, Prince describes the life of a woman struggling to make ends meet. He states, "Little sister making minimum wage/Living in a one-room jungle-monkey cage/Can't get over, she's almost dead/She may not be in the black/But she's happy she ain't in the red" ("America"). The battle for this young woman is to live a normal life; she does not have the American dream. In fact, she is struggling just to live, but she is grateful that, at the very least, her circumstance is not as bad as it could be. She does not live in a nice home, but in a "one-room jungle-monkey cage," which could be interpreted as a small and possibly poorly conditioned apartment. She does not make a lot of money; in fact, she barely makes enough to survive. She works diligently every day and may actually work herself to death. Again, Prince is juxtaposing the traditional American ideals. Instead of living a two-story house, with a dog and white picket fence, this woman is barely able to live from what she makes and has to live in poor conditions for shelter. According to Barry, New Historicism "practises a mode of study in which literary and non-literary texts are given equal weight and constantly inform or interrogate each other" (172). In the case of the second verse, instead of using literary and non-literary text, Prince uses reality and fantasy. The fantasy of the perfect American life is completely different

from the reality of the average American. By comparing the reality and fantasy, Prince is suggesting that the audience questions what is real and what is not. He wants people to question whether or not the people in America can provide for themselves in a fair, productive manner. Through this new questioning of the American Dream, citizens can be inspired to fight for changes, such as an increased minimum/living wage, more financial investment in public education, and greater access to college. Again, Prince's desire is not for his listeners to hate their country, but to understand that it is their duty as citizens who love their country to be courageous critical thinkers who can identify and challenge wrongs, such as the existence of the working poor.

The last verse of the song focuses on young man whom Prince named Jimmy Nothing. Jimmy is a young student who goes against the grain. Prince states, "Jimmy Nothing never went to school/They made him pledge allegiance/He said it wasn't cool/Nothing made Jimmy proud/Now Jimmy lives on a mushroom cloud" ("America"). The first line of the verse, "Jimmy Nothing never went to school," implies that Jimmy is part of the "uneducated," and that his apathy to education is connected to his lack of national pride. Jimmy refuses to say the pledge of allegiance because he has no pride. Jimmy's sense of not being proud could refer to various things; for example, he may not be proud of himself, and, even in reference to the overall theme of the song, he is not proud of his country. This attitude of not caring continues when Prince references the "mushroom cloud," which could indicate that Jimmy lives his life in a constant high, thus always in a state of fantasy. However, Prince is also making a reference to the Vietnam war as well as World War II; the use of nuclear bombs which produce a "mushroom cloud," the increased uses of marijuana, and the rebellious young American citizens who would rather make love and not war. Barry states that new historicist writing, "seems less overtly polemical and more willing to allow the historical evidence its own voice" (178). However, this is not the entire case in regards to "America." The entire song, especially this verse, is political in nature, but, instead of being completely direct about it, Prince acts more as a guide. He is encouraging his audience, his fans, all Americans, to review the history and see what has come from it. Prince makes the point that if current or future generations do not take pride in whom they are or do not care enough about the past to try to change the future, then the future of America is condemned to repeat the mistakes of its past. Moreover, connecting the first two verses to this third verse, Prince seems to be asserting that the greed of the American aristocrats and the hellish existence of the working poor combine to create the apathy of the iGeneration, which leads to increased teenage drug use, teenage pregnancy, and teenage violence, especially homicide and suicide. It seems that for Prince, the revisioning of freedom and democracy will be essential to saving America.

Prince is one of America's greatest musical icons. His music changed a generation and continues to influence future generations with his unique beats and aggressive, but honest lyrics. His song, "America," provides common views of the average American while encouraging them to take pride in who they are. "America" explains the paradox that America is just as Barry describes how "…new historicism (as indeed the name implies) embodies a paradox…" (173). The paradox of America has occurred since its formation; even now, the same people, police, who are supposed to be protecting the public are the same ones killing innocent, unarmed citizens. The same is said for the elected leaders, who fall short of the citizens' standards and, eventually, are corrupted by the power that they possess. However, Prince does express, without

truly saying it, that if Americans are expected to be proud of themselves and their country, they must first face their problems and then make the commitment to fixing said problems. According to an article published on Scoopry.com, "Obviously the Cold War juxtaposition and imagery [in Prince's "America"] are outdated, but the idea — that American freedom requires an intellectual, moral, and physical commitment — is expressed as well, if not better, than any other lyricist has done since the advent of rock and roll" ("Prince Wrote America's Best…"). Prince was well ahead of his time and understood his influence as well as history's influence on the generations to come. It is now the duty of all Americans to make the commitment to solving the nation's issues and provide the future generation with a history of which to be proud, an America that in Prince's words will "keeping the children free" ("America").

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Prince: (1958-2016)/Five Takes on Genius in a Different Key

by Jerry W. Ward, Jr.

1. By the time Prince Rogers Nelson got the attention of my ears and eyes, I was thirty-something. I only heard music through the filter of blues/jazz/soul and thought mainly of visual presentations of the self as one stereotype challenging another. Age was more than a number. It was a prejudicial wall constructed by the ideologies associated with the Civil Rights Movement, Black Power, and the Black Arts/Black Aesthetic Movement. My initial impression of Prince was "This dude is androgyny personified, a quaint shock of recognition." I heard his musical genius but severely questioned his motives and commitments. Age ensured that I would never be attuned to Prince the way I was to Aretha Franklin and Marvin Gaye, James Brown and Etta James. The Berlin Wall of suspicion was never breached or dismantled.

2. Prince was never one of my favorite artists. It wasn't a matter of disliking him. It was a matter of not understanding him any more than I understand hip hop as a logical progression of the blues.

3. As a poet, Prince exists in my mind with Curtis Mayfield, Nina Simone, Cassandra Wilson, Stevie Wonder, and Gil Scott-Heron, with figures who braid words and music in ways that intrigue, challenge, or baffle at different times in uniquely different ways. I am not willing to play the funky, obscene game of pitting one against the other for the amusement of a cruel, absurd, fucked down and up world. It suffices that I acknowledge Prince as a genius, a tormented genius, in a different key.

4. I take a few of Prince's creations ----"Purple Rain," "1999," "When Doves Cry," "I Wanna Be Your Lover," and "Mary Don't You Weep" ----as touchstones for engaging socio-political issues. These engagements are surreal and very appropriately mysterious. They are as mysterious as was/is Prince's location in the field of gender.

5. Prince's most noteworthy use of literary device is fractal metaphor.

The Spiritual as the Political in the Works of Prince and the Staple Singers
by C. Liegh McInnis

The Staple Singers addressing political issues through the moral lens became the epitome of blending gospel, blues, and funk into freedom songs to create mass popular message music. As Bob Dylan asserted about the Staple Singers performing and recording his songs, "They were the type of artists that I wanted recording my songs" (Roberts) because they had the talent and the cultural clout to move black and white, gospel and secular audiences in a way that few before them could. "In the 60s, the Staple Singers were Civil Rights icons, writing songs about the black experience and performing them at Martin Luther King's meetings and folk festivals" (Rogers). For all their own songs that they penned to aid the march toward social and political justice, their 1965 live album, *Freedom Highway: Recorded Live at Chicago's New Nazareth Church*, stands as a hallmark of their artistic contribution to change America. Much like Prince's 2001 *Rainbow Children*, *Freedom Highway* is both anthem and protest work, designed to convince listeners that Civil Rights work is God's work for when Jesus was resurrected from the grave He liberated humans from spiritual and physical enslavement, which, for the Staple Singers and Prince, are often embodied in police harassment, discriminatory hiring and promoting practices, poorly funded educational systems, poverty, and discrimination in the judicial system, especially as it relates to sentencing practices. When discussing *Freedom Highway*, Sony Legacy producer Steve Berkowitz states, "In that house of worship and in so many across the country, black church leaders were the political leaders, certainly led by the Rev. Martin Luther King. [*Freedom Highway*] is the witness of it" (Roberts). *LA Times* journalist Randall Roberts adds, "Taken as a whole, the album reconfirms the vital role that churches served in organizing citizens to embark on acts of civil disobedience. The long-overdue reissue of the April 9 performance at New Nazareth makes repeated references to the 1965 march from Selma to Montgomery, Ala." As such, through the examination of liberation theology, the works of the Staple Singers, and the works of Prince, both can be shown as excellent examples that the Afrocentric utilitarian nature of African-American art persisted through its commercialization. Moreover, it becomes clear that African-American popular art has been most resistant to capitalism's attempt to divorce not just spirituality from popular art but socio-political spirituality from popular or commercial art. On March 16, 2019, my wife and I attended a Blues concert, featuring the legendary Betty Wright, the iconic Willie Clayton, two lesser-known but important Southern Soul artists Urban Mystic and Tre Williams, and locally known artist Dave Mack. What is most telling to this discussion is that of the five artists on this bill, four of them performed a song celebrating their relationship to a higher power even though they are known mostly as sexually explicit artists. Even more telling is the affirming reaction of the almost full coliseum of African Americans who had not accepted the more Eurocentric notion of the separation of the body from the spirit or the secular from the sacred. Of course, this example can be extended to include several artists, such as Al Green and Little Richard, both of whom left the secular world to produce gospel music and spent much of their lives moving between the two, like Aretha Franklin and many others. Yet, the Staple Singers and Prince became those rare, not exclusive but rare, artists who found a way to reconcile the secular to the sacred both musically and lyrically to produce art that serves to minister to the body as well as to the soul within the very rigid confines of a Judeo-Christian context, specifically promoting that crimes against humanity are innately and organically crimes against God, imploring listeners to

manifest their faith and spiritual development through socio-political engagement. As Roberts writes about Pops Staples,

> "A friend to Martin Luther King Jr., Pops and his family worked churches throughout the South during the Movement. With a Chicago home base, the Staple Singers toured to spread gospel and gospel-inspired protest songs, filling sanctuaries with Pops' influential guitar work, rich with an electrified tremolo tone, and the family's pitch-perfect harmonies. 'From that march, words were revealed, and a song was composed,' Pops says on the album of the song "Freedom Highway," phrasing the truth as though it were delivered via stone tablets. He dedicates the call-to-action song 'to all of the freedom marchers.'"

In an interview with noted music writer Neil Strauss, Prince asserts that "most people don't want to talk about politics and religion. They say, 'Let's talk about something else.'" Addressing 9/11, violence in general, and other related issues, Prince continues, "We like to talk like this. We can talk forever about what's wrong, but we like to think about solutions…When everyone recognizes Jehovah's name, then everyone will be happy because everyone will know what to do and how to do it." For the Staple Singers and Prince, there was no addressing the socio-political evils of humanity without addressing the notion that in God lay all the answers.

The entire body of work by the Staple Singers and the post-80s work of Prince are a product and reflection of liberation theology, which "is a synthesis of Christian theology and various socio-economic analyses (Marxist being one) that emphasizes social concern for the poor and the political liberation for oppressed peoples" (Cook 203). More specifically, black liberation theology refers to a theological perspective which originated among African-American seminarians and scholars and in some black churches in the United States and later in other parts of the world. In most applications, there is a contextualizing of Christianity or Islam in an attempt to help those of African descent overcome oppression. It especially focuses on the injustices committed against African Americans and black South Africans during American segregation and apartheid, respectively. Black theology seeks to liberate non-white people from multiple forms of political, social, economic, and religious subjugation and views Christian and Islamic theology as a theology of liberation. However, myopically, many scholars assert that the "Modern American origins of contemporary black theology can be traced to July 31, 1966, when an *ad hoc* group of 51 concerned clergy, calling themselves the National Committee of Negro Churchmen, bought a full-page ad in *The New York Times* to publish their 'Black Power Statement,' which proposed a more aggressive approach to combating racism using the Bible for inspiration" (Hagerty).

Yet, contrary to Hagerty's assertion, liberation theology is not a product or outgrowth of the practice of Christianity by African Americans but is an outgrowth of the African and, furthermore, ancient African notion that every aspect of life is connected to the higher spiritual beings and the spiritual realm and that anything that threatens to sever that connection must be transformed or removed. In contrast, atheism is a relatively new concept in the African Diaspora, rarely being documented before the 1600s. Additionally, the concept of Ubuntu, which became prevalent in the 1800s, is considered to be rooted in a secular humanistic framework (McGowan). However, Ubuntu does not deny the existence of a god or

the spiritual world but rather places emphasis on the interconnectedness of human beings through the affirmation of "I am because we are" through "the belief in a universal bond of sharing that connects all humanity" ("About the Name"). Thus, this holistic cultural tie to a higher power creates a utilitarian approach to art, as opposed to the art for art's sake ideology, so that all art is a product of ritual, and ritual, in its most innate form, is about didactic or teaching. That is—a ritual is generally designed to teach something. So art, from an Afrocentric notion, was inextricably tied to ritual or teaching, which is why W. E. B. Du Bois could proclaim quite confidently that "all art is propaganda" (757). In its earliest days, from the moment that Africans began resisting European colonization and enslavement on the continent of Africa and on every landmass where African bodies were disseminated as chattel, the Freedom or Liberation Movement was a moral movement even more so than a legal movement as freedom was viewed as a moral right ordained by God that "man must not dominate man to his injury" (*Ecclesiastes* 8:9). The Christian Bible also asserts "Woe to those who enact evil statutes and to those who constantly record unjust decisions, so as to deprive the needy of justice and rob the poor of My people of their rights so that widows may be their spoil and that they may plunder the orphans. Now, what will you do in the day of punishment, and in the devastation which will come from afar? To whom will you flee for help? And where will you leave your wealth?" (*Isaiah* 10:1-3). And, according to the *Qur'an*, "Turmoil and oppression are worse than slaughter/murder," further asserting that "God will not bless the aggressor of violence" (Surah 2:190 – 194). The *Qur'an* also teaches that "whoever has his brother under his control, let him feed him of his same food and dress him of his same dress. Never saddle them with work that goes beyond his capability. If the work happens to be somehow difficult, lend him a helping hand." Yet, it must be noted that African people where practitioners of religion or believers in spiritual deities long before they were Christians and Muslims. And, two of those earliest core religions, Yoruba and Igbo both have proverbs that denounce slavery and oppression as against the natural physical and spiritual order of things. One Yoruba proverb states "The sword cannot tell the smith's head from others," which means that natural justice does not play favorites. Another Yoruba proverb asserts that "He who decides a case after hearing only one side is the dean of wicked persons," which means that justice requires considering both sides of a case and is no respecter of person. An Igbo proverb states that "if a servant does good to his master, he is in fear; if he does bad to him, he is still in fear," meaning that there is nothing good or no satisfactory reward from servitude or slavery. A second Igbo proverb states "let the hawk perch, let the eagle perch; the one that tells the other not to perch, let his wing break," which is an admonition that one who attempts to deceive another will receive a just and natural punishment.

As such, according to the Yoruba-African worldview, "the essence of evil…consists in doing harm to others" (Oluwole quoted in Dassaolu and Oyelakun).

> "While the Yorubas may cite punishment as the reason why God allows evil to be meted out to some people, the Igbos argue that those we perceive as good people and are not worthy to experience evil are experiencing evil because they must have erred in their previous lifetime and are only serving the punishment of previous deeds…The Igbos have attempted to discuss how the presence of evil can be reconciled with the attributes of Chi-Ukwu (the ultimate spirit). Such an attempt has divided Igbo philosophers into three major camps, namely: the Igbo cosmological optimistic view; Personal God and destiny view; and middle course view. The first view states that man is solely

> accountable for the evil in the world; the second speaks of personal god and destiny, while the final camp combines the two views together and includes some spirits as responsible for the evil in the world. (Dassaolu and Oyelakun)

Thus, to argue that "contemporary black theology can be traced to July 31, 1966" ignores, minimizes, or voids the history of ancient African religions and the work that many African and African-American Freedom Fighters, such as Nat Turner, David Walker, Harriet Tubman, Sojourner Truth, Frederick Douglass, Booker T. Washington, W. E. B. Du Bois, Marcus Garvey, Noble Drew Ali, and many others, accomplished all in the name of doing God's work to bring peace to the earth by ending man's domination of man to man's injury. Therefore, both the Staple Singers and Prince were working in a tradition as old as history of the spiritual as the political as continued by Martin Luther King, Jr., el-Hajj Malik el-Shabazz better known as Malcolm X, Jesse Jackson, Al Sharpton, Calvin Butts, and Louis Farrakhan, all of whom were ministers making a moral appeal to end injustice. And, even today, some of the most noted voices against injustice are those who see the spiritual as innately wed to the political, such as Dr. Cornel West, Dr. Eddie Glaude, and Tavis Smiley, two of whom would become friends of Prince. So, clearly, the goal of both the Staple Singers and Prince was to ensure that the tradition and circle of fighting for socio-political justice through spiritual evolution remain unbroken.

While entire books can be dedicated to the work of the Staple Singers, such as Greg Kot's *I'll Take You There: Mavis Staples, the Staple Singers, and the Music That Shaped the Civil Rights Era*, I will focus my attention on five of their songs to show how their work is the soil from which Prince's work blossoms. First, to address the March on Selma is to address the violence and bloodshed that is innately a part of a people's liberation struggle. To that end, "Freedom Highway," from *Freedom Highway* (1965), is not a "feel good" anthem that desires to pacify or make whites comfortable. True to their form, the Staple Singers get to the heart and throat of the matter with "Found dead people in the forest/ Tallahatchie River and lakes/ The whole world is wonderin'/ What's wrong with the United States?" With this picture, one quickly realizes that to "March down freedom highway,/ Marchin' each and every day" is not a leisurely stroll in the peaceful park but an act in which one risks one's very life merely to engage the basic rights and liberties of being human. Most importantly, this refutes the notion that the Civil Rights Movement was a moment in which whites suddenly came to their senses and benevolently extended rights of citizenship to African Americans. It was just the opposite when, often, America was both financially forced to extend true citizenship to African Americans while being internationally shamed by the blood of millions of African Americans that had been slaughtered in this liberation struggle. And, if one thinks it is hyperbole that "the whole world [was] wondering what's wrong with the United States," one must remember that it was a European newspaper article criticizing President Kennedy for being in Europe asking the Europeans to be more open to democracy when he, as the paper put it, "was not providing democracy to all of his own citizens." Yet, the song ends in encouragement, if not with hope, by declaring "Made up my mind that I won't turn around," which infers that there is hope that enables people to keep marching toward victory. Similarly, "Why Am I Treated So Bad," from *Why* (1966), is more of a Blues or Folk/Blues than a Gospel tune, but the belief in God's ability to make things right remains steadfast. Beginning the song by talking, Pops Staples paints a picture of children being abused merely because of their color. "My friend, you know this world is in a bad condition. Just the other day I saw a group of little children trying to ride a school

bus. By them being of a different nationality, they weren't allowed to ride the bus. I imagine that, if you would ask them about this matter, they would have words like this to say." Then, all the Staple Singers begin with a slow moan of "Why am I treated so Bad?/ You know I'm all alone as I sing this song/ Hear my call; I've done nobody wrong/ But, I'm treated so bad." The pain and seemingly hopeless situation is given hope with "I'm gonna walk out in the Master's lane/ Things I do, they seem to be in vain/ You may be blind; you may be lame/ But, walk on out in the Master's name/ Though you treated so bad." Once, again, the Staple Singers are confronting hopelessness with hope in the form of God's very presence. The mentioning of being "blind" and "lame" are obvious biblical references to Jesus' miracles of making the blind man see in *John* 9 and making the lame man walk in *John* 5. The message, of course, is that no problem is too great for God, even Jim Crow. Yet, on an even deeper level, given Jesus' lecture on spiritual blindness at the end of *John* 9, as well as the fact that during Jesus' time people believed that physical, mental, and emotional illnesses were products of sin, the message is also that the work of the Civil Rights Movement is not just to obtain legal rights but to cure the spiritual blindness and lameness of the vast majority of America's white population.

"Long Walk to DC," from *Soul Folk in Action* (1968), promotes marching as a tool of political engagement. Yet, it begins by imploring African Americans not to allow their economic hardships and limitations to keep them from walking in faith. "It's a long walk to DC, but I've got my walking shoes on/ I can't take a plane/ passenger train because my money ain't that long/…but I know I'll make it someday/…I know it's a whole lotta rocks and riffs before I make it there/…I gotta dime for some coffee, I gotta dime to buy me some cake/ I gotta see the president no matter what it takes/…I may be lonely…but I know I'll make it someday." They present the negative not as a deterrent but as a way to prepare the people for the difficulty of the journey so that the people will know what to expect and will not quit when the struggle becomes difficult in the same way that King does when he states in "I've Been to the Mountaintop," "We've got some difficult days ahead…But, I want you to know tonight that we, as a people, will get to the Promised Land." Also, the Staples' line of "I'm going up to yonder" has double meaning, especially when compared to King's "Mountaintop." On the one hand, by naming the southern towns and states—"Jackson, our Mississippi town/Through Alabama…I'm Memphis bound/ North Carolina, Virginia too"—from which people were coming to march to DC, the point is that, for local people throughout the country to obtain relief and justice, they must engage local, state, and national politics, which means being knowledgeable of and involved in the politics of DC, which is up north or up "yonder." However, since the 1894 publication of James Milton Black's "When the Roll Is Called Up Yonder," "yonder" has also meant heaven. Thus, to go "up to yonder" means to take one's troubles to God and to the White House. Through this, the Staple Singers are not asking African Americans to put their faith in nobles as *Psalms* 146:3 warns but to put their faith in God that he will give them what they need to change or slay (emotionally) the hearts of white elected officials. And, through this faith in God, they will be able to endure the hardships and overcome their economic limitations to create massive political change. Similarly, "We the People," from their 1972 breakthrough album, *Be Altitude: Respect Yourself*, which features "Respect Yourself" and "I'll Take You There," tropes the work of "Long Walk to DC" to implore listeners that they have the power "to make the world go round" and the ability to reshape "the world now" into what they need it to be, continuing the theme of reciprocity by adding "what you give is what you get." Yet, they never lose their focus on spiritual development and its connection to physical behavior, asserting "Hot pants in style;

don't let our world go wild/ Mama's youngest child is learning fast/ got to get up as soon as you get down/ Don't get nothing from, uh, messing around." What's clear with this song and other songs, such as "Respect Yourself," is that the Staple Singers' messages and warnings are not just aimed at white iniquity but at all iniquity, making them the ultimate poet-activist by speaking truth to power and truth to family. And, finally, "This Is a Perfect World," from *The Staple Swingers* (1971), puts the onus of saving the world on humanity to use what God has given it to live in peace and harmony as God desires. The song begins with what sounds like rapid gunfire followed by an ominous bassline. So, immediately the listener is immersed in the doom and gloom of a chaotic and dysfunctional time, much like Prince's "Dance On." But, suddenly, the lyrics begin by denouncing what the listeners think the world is with "This is a perfect world so let's stop trying to make it what it's not./ Everybody's wondering about the world and what it's coming to/ but it ain't the world but the people that's making it hard for you/ If you don't believe that what I say is true/ then show me the day that the sun will shine and fail to shine on you…We got to get it together and decide what we gon' do/we oughta show the Man who made us all that we can be perfect too." Much like Prince does later in "One Song" and on *Lovesexy* (1988) and *The Rainbow Children* (2001), in "This Is a Perfect World," the Staple Singers are not just challenging people to be better. They are challenging humanity's notion of reality. Regardless of most people's spiritual ideology, perfection is usually seen as something unobtainable or something separate and apart from the physical world. Very few people, other than Confucius and Buddha to some degree, have asserted that perfection is obtainable in the now, in the physical world. But, the Staple Singers are arguing not so much for perfection but for humanity to make the most of what it has. By using the word, "decision," they are asserting that mankind has a choice to be good or evil, orderly or chaotic, useful/functional rather than dysfunctional. Ultimately, they are inferring that humanity is already reaping its punishment for not following God's law by living in an earthly hell. Yet, once, again, the hope is that humanity has the ability to remake or reshape the world that it has destroyed into the world that God initially designed.

In 2016, Mavis Staples was still singing

> the political songs she became known for [singing in the 60s and 70s], like "Why (Am I Treated So Bad)?," written by her father for the Little Rock Nine, the black children whose parents fought for them to attend the all-white Arkansas school. She'll never stop singing those songs, she says. "They're still relevant. You know, sometimes I can watch the news on the television and I feel like I'm back in the 60s." Her [2016] album [*Livin' on a High Note*] also features "MLK Song," based around a Martin Luther King speech Staples remembers hearing, put together by her producer, M Ward. Her vocals on it are unshowy and obviously from the heart: "In the march for peace / Tell them I played the drum / When I have to meet my day," she sings. (Rogers)

Yet, it was "Prince [who] brought Staples out of semi-retirement at the height of his fame in the 80s, writing two solo albums for her: she calls him her son. 'I text him to let him know that I know what he's up to,' she says, with a laugh [just one month before Prince's death]" (Rogers). As I explain in my book, *The Lyrics of Prince* (1996), by the late 80s, Prince was beginning to connect openly with the legacy of black music befriending Miles Davis and signing George Clinton and Mavis Staples to Paisley Park who also star in the film *Graffiti Bridge* in which Prince revises his role of The Kid. The Kid's dad, to whom he prays at the beginning of "Can't

Stop (This Feeling I Got)," represents the spiritual/ancestral notion of music. It is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things unseen that keep him pushing forward in a time when art is seemingly completely co-opted by the moneychangers, rendering it impotent to impact a mass movement. The physical embodiments of this idea are Mavis Staples and George Clinton, links to the legacy of socially conscious music and forefathers to Prince's own legacy of music. Embracing his father's memory and the mentorship of Staples and Clinton allows the Kid to maintain his faith and create inspirational art in a world that is corrupting art merely for the sake of financial gain. Thus, the songs, "Can't Stop (This Feeling I Got)" and "Still Would Stand All Time," are explicit declarations that a spiritual revolution is needed to save humanity.

"Can't Stop (This Feeling I Got)" is Prince's declaration that no one can stop the feeling or agenda of love. Once one has love, it consumes one, and one must share it. This is the ultimate purpose of art, to elevate man. "My body wants it down to my bones." In the film, the Kid has it, but nobody else seems to want it. Using one's art to achieve a higher self is not as popular as sex and violence. Yet, despite the depths of his discouragement, he realizes that he is unable to stop this inner drive, "I can't sleep at night...I can't shake it." The final notion is that with love, the New Power Generation "can change anything...Only we [the lovers of the world] can change the world." However, the struggle to change the world is difficult so Prince bookends "Can't Stop (This Feeling I Got)" with "Still Would Stand All Time," which encompasses the entire theme of *Graffiti Bridge*. "When a man screams, you must learn to whisper." These are the words of strength given to the Kid by Aura just before she sacrifices her life for the union of Seven Corners. In a physical world of chaos, one must learn to listen so that one can hear the voice of divine wisdom. In "👁 no" from *Lovesexy*, Prince describes the voice of the devil. "He talks so loud. He'll make u do things, hang out with the crowd. 👁 know there was confusion, lightin' all around me." In contrast to the voice of the devil, the voice of God is a whisper, filled with power. "But my Lord, He's so quiet. He calls your name. When u hear it, your heart will Thunder—U will want 2 hear it every day." Man must be able to focus beyond the physical to recognize the essence of life, which lies in the metaphysical. People must learn to look with the eyes of their souls and not their physical eyes. Only then will people know that love is and has been with them the entire time. They have been focusing on the wrong target. Humanity must learn to be still to find love, to find God. If falling in love is truly believing that there is joy in repetition, then it is "Love that reaffirms that we are not alone. And night and day will run together, and all things would be fine." Love, peace, and happiness are there. Humanity must learn to remain faithful, strong, and longsuffering. "It's not a thousand years away...It's just around the corner. It's just around the block. If we all say yes and try, then Heaven on Earth we will find. Love can save us all." "Still Would Stand All Time" is a song for weary times and weary soldiers, as the Kid pleads, "Love, please give us a sign." For when love captures the hearts of men "then men will fight injustice instead of one another." During a 1990 aftershow in Europe, Prince elaborates on the song's meaning by stating "That means Time would stand still if you turn all that around." Perhaps singer Tevin Campbell, in his 1990 interview for BET's *Screen Scene* special on *Graffiti Bridge*, summarizes the song and the movie best: "It's about never giving up" because, when one achieves love, time will stand still. This is affirmed in "Graffiti Bridge," the closing song of the movie and the album. It articulates all for which the Kid and humanity are searching, which is love. "Everybody wants 2 find Graffiti Bridge, something to believe in, a reason 2 believe that there's a heaven on Earth...Everybody's looking

4 love." The tone of the song is jubilation, as the primary characters alternate verses throughout the song. The Kid finds his love and his reason to continue.

While *Graffiti Bridge* was the first public connection Prince was making with Mavis Staples, his music had long carried the spirit of the Staple Singers' message that only the love of God can save humanity. As early as 1981's *Controversy*, Prince makes it clear that, for him, all human iniquity are manifestations of spiritual depravity in "Annie Christian" who is the offspring of a sexually oppressed and perverted society who has come home to roost. The state of womankind, then, is critically important to the salvation and state of mankind—a notion that Prince will build upon throughout his career. By using the female as a metaphor for the anti-Christ, he is able to use familiar imagery to personify evil, making the song more relevant and interesting, citing Eve's offspring as the driving force behind all evil in the world, using the Atlanta child murders, the assassination of John Lennon, and the attempted assassination of former President Ronald Reagan as examples. As it relates to the work of the Staple Singers, the discussing of the attempted assassination of Reagan, a man who had worked to cut and underfund programs designed to help the poor while he also aided in the advancing of the NRA, evokes the motif that all wrongs will be righted or, as Kalamu ya Salaam asserts in *What Is Life?: Reclaiming the Black Blues Self*, in his definition of the Blues aesthetic, the song presents "an optimistic faith in the ultimate triumph of justice in the form of karma. what is wrong will be righted. what is last will be first. balance will be brought back into the world" (14). Thus, contrasting "Annie Christian" with "Melody Cool," which was written for Staples and appears on *Graffiti Bridge*, where chaos, destruction, and death result from the selfishness of Annie, order, progress, and everlasting life result from the selflessness of Melody, embodied as Staples. "They call me Melody Cool/ I was here long before you/ If you're good I will love you/ But, I'm nobody's fool/…Every woman and every man/ One day they just got to understand/ That if we play in the same key/ everything will be/ Melody Cool." Still, Prince and Staples are clear that even love must be obeyed because to work against the natural order of love, which is to hurt others, will bring natural/physical consequence: "When I was born there were tidal waves/ Whole town went under nobody saved/ At every funeral it rained every time I sang." For Staples and Prince God is physics, or the laws that constitute physics are merely physical manifestations of God's being and will. Everything has an equal and opposite reaction whereas doing good begets good and doing bad begets bad. Or, as *Deuteronomy* 11:26 – 28 asserts, "See, I am setting before you today a blessing and a curse—the blessing if you obey the commands of the Lord your God that I am giving you today; the curse if you disobey the commands of the Lord your God and turn from the way that I command you today." Love must be followed or chaos will reign supreme. And, as George Clinton asserts in "Maggot Brain" from *Live at the Beverly Center* (1990), "I believe in God, and I know that law and order must prevail. But, if and when the laws of man are not just, equal, and fair, then the laws of nature will come and do her thang." This is Salaam's "ultimate triumph of justice" and "balance" being "brought back into the world" that spans from the beginnings of African (human) civilization into the present that Clinton, Staples, and Prince are declaring is the same today as it was at the dawn of human history.

Another song that most do not connect in the vein of the Staple Singers is "Free" from 1982's *1999*, which encourages listeners to be thankful for their accomplishments and the freedom they have to achieve more. Yet, Prince also realizes that people should not lose sight of the never-ending fight for freedom, "Be glad that u are free, there's many a man who's not...We

will fight for the right 2 be free..." "Free" is spiritual in the manner that spirituals were used by African Americans during the Civil Rights Movement of the 1960s. It is meant to stir the soul and motivate the heart in the campaign toward complete freedom. The use of the piano provides an undeniable gospel tone that is amplified by his wailing at the end of the song. "Soldiers are a marching; they're writing brand new laws. Will we all fight together 4 the most important cause? Will we all fight 4 the right 2 be free?" Prince is pushing the fight for freedom and the notion that to fight for freedom is a never-ending battle because evil (conservatism) never sleeps and is always waiting to roll back the clock of progress. At the end of most shows during the 1999 tour, Prince would end by stating to the audience in an almost urging tone, "Don't u let nobody tell you what to do!" It seems that early in his career, the biggest sin for Prince is allowing someone else to define you. "Free" is meant to echo the importance of self-determination as a God-given right. Where the Staple Singers were using the Thomas Dolby's mode of infusing gospel lyrics in blues and funk flavored tunes, Prince was using the tone of gospel/freedom songs and infusing that tone with lyrics about individual freedom. Yet, the notion of soldiers marching against those who want to live freely causes the song to have more of a collectivist tone, if not meaning, than most realize, planting Prince squarely in the tradition of the Staple Singers.

An additional song that presents natural/physical consequences as a result of socio-political evil is "U Will Be Moved," which ☥ [The Artist Formerly Known as Prince] penned for Mavis Staples and appears on both *The Voice* (1993) and *1800NEWFUNK* (1994). Again, ☥ is asserting that those who gain from the oppression and exploitation of others will suffer the wrath of God.

> U will be moved when the baby lets out his very first cry, moved when u think of how hard he'll have 2 try. He'll grow up on an empty stomach and try his best 2 listen 2 a teacher readin' from a school book with half the pages missing. Surely when the rain comes, u will be moved.

☥ is using rain as a symbol of power and as a punishment by God, which is then troped in "Right the Wrong" from *Chaos and Disorder* (1996): "Before long u won't hear nothing but the crackle of flames...It seems like we could stop the flow of snow in the sky today. i guess the weatherman, he likes the rain, ain't that insane?" "U Will Be Moved" is the gateway or foundation for "Right the Wrong" through which ☥ directly denounces America's system of oppression as unrighteous and ungodly. "U will be moved when the baby makes all the grades; moved u will be when they don't hire him anyway." Even with his anger, ☥ proposes a solution "to a system that offers no guarantee...that education is the answer and love is the only key." It is this hope that resonates in all of his music and explodes in "Right the Wrong." "And even though injustice took them hills away, one day we'll get 'em back. The Sun's gonna shine that day when we say 'Right the wrong.'" This is what connects ☥'s work to the Staple Singers. He finds a way to grapple with issues but also raises that grappling to a discourse of finding solutions, not glorifying the problems. Even in the bleak "Same December" from *Chaos and Disorder*, there is a solution to the game of capitalism. Save your soul by rebuking and fleeing the game and learning to love: "Until the demons fall as far as anyone can fall, when they reap what they done sowed, i'll be standin' tall. We spend our whole lives tryin' 2 dog the other man, when what we need 2 do is try 2 give him all we can."

The tone in "Right the Wrong," "Same December," and "U Will Be Moved" is anger and reprehension. These are not pleas; these are warnings to the oppressor that he will reap what he sows, and as Booker T. Washington asserts in his "Atlanta Compromise," from his autobiography, *Up From Slavery*, "Nearly sixteen millions of hands will aid you in pulling the load upward, or they will pull against you the load downward" (155). Although Washington is being passive, his message is clear. How whites treat African Americans will result in what they reap. Ironically, white Americans have yet to realize how the current poverty and violence in America's streets are directly tied to slavery, Jim Crow, and the continued perpetuation of the second-class citizenship of African Americans. To accomplish the tone of reprehension, ☥ is finding his heroic voice through biblical imagery in much the same manner as the Staple Singers.

☥ is not merely preaching that God is going to punish the evil. His ultimate message becomes the righteous will be rewarded because only love can conquer hate. With this use of typology, ☥ falls in line with the legacy of African American literature, which is to recreate, reconstruct, and refashion myth, history, and legend to celebrate and give African Americans a sense of place, purpose, and self-worth. ☥ is destroying the lie of white supremacy by equating the current-day white oppressors with the oppressors of the *Holy Bible* who are destroyed by God because of their sins. Thus, people of color become the chosen people or the Rainbow Children as they are identified in Prince's album of the same name. This is the largest step of growth for ☥. In these three songs, he is pushing directly against white supremacy. In the past, he railed abstractly against oppression. Now, oppression has a face, a history, and a legacy. Through his use of biblical imagery, ☥ is asserting that there will be retribution. The child in "U Will Be Moved" matures and leads the revolution in "Right the Wrong." ☥ is asserting that society should not punish the child but the system that creates the child because this system will eventually contaminate all of the children. Or, as even emcee Tupac Shakur would articulate later, "The Hate U Give Little Infants Fucks Everybody (THUG LIFE)" and as so eloquently explained in Angie Thomas' novel *The Hate U Give* (2017). In *The Fire Next Time*, Baldwin warns that the black boy and the white boy are brothers in the same house. If something inflicts one, the whole house is contaminated. Further, ☥ is asserting the same notion that Malcolm X is asserting when he states that chickens do come home to roost. The mass shootings and killings in suburban schools involving disturbed and disgruntled white teens in Pearl, Mississippi, Littleton, Colorado, Jonesboro, Arkansas, Parkland, Florida, and other places represent the turning inward of the violence and anger of whites that for so long has been aimed at and internalized by African Americans. As ☥ is asserting in "U Will Be Moved" and "Right the Wrong," Caucasians are spending so much time perpetuating white supremacy that they are not noticing how that violence is being internalized by their children. This teenage angst and violence, which had been linked to African American children, is now seeping into white neighborhoods. Much like his commentary on AIDS in 1987, ☥ is right on target as a social poet.

Of course, entire books can be written about the manner in which *The Rainbow Children* exemplifies liberation theology. So, I'll just address a few other songs, one being "2045: Radical Man" from the 2000 *Bamboozled* soundtrack and as part of *The Slaughterhouse* (2001). It's not just the lyrics of "2045: Radical Man" that fulfill the mantra of liberation theology but that Prince imitates Minister Farrakhan at the beginning and ending of the song. It would be

expected that the early Prince of "Uptown," from *Dirty Mind* (1980), "Sexuality," from *Controversy*, and even "Race," from *The Gold Experience* (1995), would be inclined to imitate King or, as he does on "Emancipation" (1996), sample King's voice. But, for Prince to mimic the cadence, intonation, and anger of Farrakhan moves him to a point where many of his white fans began to feel betrayed by the man they once viewed as their racially ambiguous nymph-child. The tale-tale sign that Prince is mimicking Farrakhan and not King is the manner in which he stresses and elongates "anything" and "any," which are classic signatures of Farrakhan's tone and phrasing. And, at the end of the song, when he returns to the spoken part, he evokes Farrakhan in both intonation and engagement of the conspiracy with "Where will you be in 2045?/ 30 million people right now are being wiped off the face of the planet/ by a disease/they claim has no cure." This is classic Farrakhan rhetoric in which the entire premise is to reveal to the masses that they are being oppressed and killed by ways in which they have no clue. In the same way that much of white America was horrified by sermons of Jeremiah Wright, many of Prince's fans felt completely betrayed and abandoned by *The Rainbow Children* as well as songs, such as "We March," from *The Gold Experience*, "Dear Mr. Man," from *Musicology* (2004), and "Radical Man 2045" as they seem to reject Prince's previous notions of "white, Black, Puerto Rican/ everybody just a freaking" to declare that Prince was now a person concerned with the specific issues and problems of the Black Diaspora and that all had to choose a side. Then, Prince cements his message by dividing the Eurocentric and the Afrocentric into opposing poles in which Europe is represented by science, and Africa is represented by spirituality, adding "We claim Miles Davis, not Michelangelo/ We planted flags in the funk/ You better act like you know/ We don't care what Albert Einstein did/ I'd rather know/ How to build a pyramid/ James Brown, Chuck D, and Jimi/ Turn me up louder now/ I don't think y'all hear me." Of course, the use of Einstein to represent the cold and oppressive nature of European stoicism and obsessive desire for science over the metaphysical is problematic, given the fact that Einstein stated that "imagination is greater than knowledge," that Einstein was a Jewish man who had seen firsthand the horrors of Nazi Germany, and that Einstein was a great champion of the arts and of civil rights, allowing Marian Anderson to stay at his home because she was not allowed to stay in a white-owned hotel. That being said, Prince's point, though, again, a bit misguided, is that art comes closest to fulfilling humanity's ultimate potential, moving mankind as close to God as possible, which was asserted as well by Aristotle in his *Poetics*, which is his rebuffing of Plato's *Republic*, in which Plato wanted to banish the poets in favor of science. So, for Prince, it is spirituality, with art as its ultimate manifestation, that will allow humanity to be all that it can be. And, to double down on his commitment to art and spirituality as the way for African Americans to improve their plight, he gives "We March" to Farrakhan to use to promote the Million Man March, which was a call for millions of African-American men to journey to DC as a public atonement for their failures to be protectors and caretakers of their communities and to renew their commitment to their spiritual evolution, which would guide their socio-political evolution.

In this vein, the two most obvious places where the careers of the Staple Singers and Prince intersect are "God Is Alive" (1988) and Prince's cover of "When Will We Be Paid?" from the Staple Singers' album *We'll Get Over* (1970). Written by Prince for Mavis Staples, "God Is Alive" makes no overt or explicit political statement, but it is forthright in its declaration that mistreating people is displeasing to God. "News is comin' like a hurricane/ Comin' down hard on those who live in vain/ Treatin' each other funky when U know we're all the same/ God is alive, this is not a game." Three things remain consistent with Prince's message in this lyric.

One, a life without love is a meaningless life as "to live in vain" is to put material things and oneself above or before helping and loving others. It is a direct reflection of *Mark* 8:36, "For what shall it profit a man, if he shall gain the whole world and lose his soul?" Two, all people are equal: "when u know we're all the same." Thus, for Prince, an innate or organic aspect of Christianity is the promotion of the equality of humanity and that, as both *Acts* 10:34 and *Romans* 2:11 – 16 assert, "God is no respecter of persons" or God holds no person higher than another person. So, for Prince, Jesus is the ultimate revolutionary who liberated humanity from physical, social, and political iniquity/bondage by declaring His love for all of Jehovah's creations. And, three, having God come "like a hurricane" continues his notion that spiritual iniquity manifests physical punishment. Moreover, with the lyric "He's lookin' 4 soldiers with strong feet/ That can dance on whoever can't say His name," Prince is asserting that it is the responsibility of the believer to be vocal and active in waging war for justice (spiritual and socio-political), affirming his place in the legacy of liberation theology crafted by the Staple Singers and others. As the old folks used to say and as evident by the work of the Staple Singers, "you don't get saved to sit down." Being a believer means that one is "willing to do the work" as Prince asserts in "The Work, Pt. 1," from *The Rainbow Children*, to put "[the ruling class] in their place." So, while not overtly political, writing "God Is Alive" for Mavis Staples is Prince's way of simultaneously repaying and continuing the legacy of liberation theology in popular music as a bookend to his covering the Staple Singers' "When Will We Be Paid?"

In 2000, Prince released his cover of "When Will We B Paid?" as a B-side to an independent single, "U Make My Sun Shine," on his own NPG Records. For the Staple Singers and Prince, a religion that does not seek to liberate man from his political and economic oppression is useless. To echo the words of Malcolm X when he was asked why he taught hate, X replied that he was providing love teaching, not hate teaching. It was X's goal to teach African people to love themselves. Unfortunately for their oppressors, once African people learn to love themselves, they can no longer abide in a situation where they are abused. God said that people are to love and forgive their enemies; He did not say anything about "hanging out" with them, especially if the oppressors refuse to change their ways once they have been shown the light or the "Truth" as Prince asserts. As *Matthew* 18:15 – 17 asserts, after doing all one can to make peace and live in harmony with one's oppressors, if that oppressor still refuses to change, then the righteous have the right to remove themselves from the presence and evil of the oppressors. "If they refuse to listen [to you, to an objective third party, or to the church body], then treat them as you would a pagan or a tax collector." Thus, Prince is aligning himself with the Staple Singers who sought to use the power of God to manifest social and political change by working to enlighten those who are willing to change and rebuking those who refuse to change. Also, he is echoing their work in that he employs the haunting qualities of the gospel organ combined with the dominant bass and beats of secular music. The music drags like a funeral procession but the beat makes it more akin to a military march, echoing the Civil Rights era. And his rhythmic shouts, hollers, and amens create an urgency and passion reflecting the blues and gospel, which affirms the Staple Singers. As the speaker, Prince assumes the role of preacher, which is amplified by the call and response of an amen corner. The song begins with a logical plea for reparations. "We fought in your wars in every land to keep this country free y'all for women, children, and men, but every time we ask for pay or loan that's when everything seems to turn out wrong." Next, logic is supplemented with emotion by showing the injustice and horror that have been inflicted on African people. "We been beat up, called names, shot

down and stoned." The song is certainly evoking the notion that those who suffer for righteousness will one day be greatly rewarded.

In the final stanza, the song combines logic and emotion, echoing the sentiments of Frederick Douglass' famous speech, "What to the Slave Is the Fourth of July?," when he asks "Will we ever be proud of our country, 'tis of thee? Will we ever sing out loud 'sweet land of liberty'?" The lyrics ascend like a sermon, building point on point until he reaches his King and X climax. "We've given up all of our sweat and all of our tears, scuffled through this life for more than three hundred years. When will we be paid?" The song is demanding a justice that restores African humanity. There is as much pain as there is anger in his voice and lyric. The phonetic troping in his voice and the music articulates that the speaker is seeking a moral justice and not merely a legal justice, especially since it tropes "My Country, 'tis of Thee," also known as "America," which claims in its fourth stanza that God is the author of America's liberty, in much the same way that "America, the Beautiful" claims that America is great because "God shed his grace on thee." Thus, the song raises a moral question and not a legal question of how can America claim the blessings of God if it refuses or withholds those blessings from its own citizens, who have shed just as much if not more blood and sweat as anyone one else so that America could become great?

In giving "We March" to Minister Farrakhan to promote the Million Man March, Prince is in the direct line and legacy of Pops Staple of creating occasional art (art created for a specific occasion or event) as utilitarian art to be in service of the social and political needs of the people. To this end, the Staple Singers and Prince become excellent examples of the socio-political tradition of African-American art as well as the long-standing tradition of liberation theology. For both, a God and a religion that is not concerned with or has not the power to end the ills of state and national-sanctioned murder and oppression of colorful bodies by law enforcement, discriminatory hiring and promotion practices, discriminatory sentencing, poor funding of education, discriminatory housing practices, homelessness, poverty, and more is not a God or a religion worth praising or embracing. Furthermore, it is all but impossible for the believer to read *James* 2:14 – 26 and not understand that the notion of "faith without work is dead" must apply to improving the socio-political condition of all men. Thus, in this legacy, for the Staple Singers and Prince, the primary goal of artistry is to appeal to the hearts and minds of listeners to produce the catharsis that moves them to evolve spiritually so that their spiritual evolution manifests itself in the socio-political structure. To do anything else is to be both ungodly and unartistic.

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Dr. Jerry W. Ward, Jr., was a Distinguished Overseas Professor at Central China Normal University (Wuhan) and Emeritus Professor of English (Tougaloo College). From 2002 to 2012, he was a Distinguished Professor of English at Dillard University, one of the co-founders of the Richard Wright Circle, and the co-editor of *Black Southern Voices*, *Redefining American Literary History*, *The Richard Wright Encyclopedia*, and *The Cambridge History of African American Literature*. His essays and poetry have appeared in a number of journals, including *Black Magnolias*, *ADE Bulletin*, *The Southern Quarterly*, *Callaloo*, *African American Review*, and the *Jackson Advocate.* His anthology *Trouble the Water: 250 Years of African American Poetry* (1997) was widely taught in college courses, and his book, *THE KATRINA PAPERS: A*

Journal of Trauma and Recovery (2008), has been hailed as an important work that gives voice and insight to the survivors of Hurricane Katrina while being a *Cane*-like force of literary blending, challenging and expanding the notions of what defines a genre. Before teaching at Dillard University, Ward worked for thirty-two years at Tougaloo College, being a bridge to Wright, Margaret Walker and many other writers for the many young minds that he molded.

Dr. Monica G. Flippin Wynn is currently Associate Professor and Director of undergraduate and graduate programs at Lindenwood University. Dr. Flippin Wynn completed her PhD in Communications from the University of Oklahoma in Norman, Oklahoma. Her current research projects include student engagement and new media, examining how new modes of communication are incorporated into academia and investigating the mainstream educational paradigms to promote erasing the disparities of race by promoting a more effective dialogue that illustrates the interrelatedness of communication concepts, health disparities, mentoring in academia, ageism, human interaction and accurate and positive media portrayals, storytelling, and the art and song styling of Princes Rogers Nelson.