

**THE SOUL OF 1971:
RETHINKING UNDERSTANDINGS OF PROTEST MUSIC**

by

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DEDICATION

In memory of my Grandma Peggy.

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ABSTRACT

1971 is not a year typically associated with protest in America: our focus is trained on more explosive years and events such as the civil rights protests in 1968, or the birth of the punk movement in 1977. Furthermore, histories of protest music overwhelmingly celebrate white, middle-class artists such as Pete Seeger, Joan Baez, and Bob Dylan. However, African-American musicians in 1971 were creating politically coherent protest songs, rooted in African-American popular music styles rather than earnest, folk-inspired and guitar-based language. The conventional valorization of protests in 1968 and 1977 may thus reinforce a white supremacist understanding of counterculture and protest music. In examining the Isley Brothers song “Ohio/Machine Gun,” Marvin Gaye’s album *What’s Going On*, and Gil Scott-Heron’s song “The Revolution Will Not Be Televised,” my goal is to illuminate our racialized understandings of protest music and to complicate standard notions of genre, gender, generation, and race in the year 1971.

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

CSNY – Crosby, Stills, Nash, and Young

TRWNBT – The Revolution Will Not Be Televised

BAM – Black Arts Movement

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When I started this project all I knew was that I wanted to study the Beatles, and over the course of two years that idea grew to take the form of studying African-American protest musicians in the year 1971. The evolution of this project came through the opportunity I had to study with the many wonderful faculty members at the Fountain School of Performing arts at Dalhousie University. Special thanks go to my supervisor Dr. Jacqueline Warwick who constantly inspired me to pursue the music that I love. Your guidance throughout this project was the driving force behind its completion and for that I cannot thank you enough.

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In the words of the famous American adventurer John Muir, “The world is big and I want to have a good look at it before it gets dark,” and now that my project is over, I plan to do just that!

CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

“You develop an instant global consciousness, a people orientation, an intense dissatisfaction with the state of the world, and a compulsion to do something about it. From out there on the moon, international politics look so petty. You want to grab a politician by the scruff of the neck and drag him a quarter of a million miles out and say, ‘Look at that, you son of a bitch.’”

- Edgar Mitchell¹

A quick glance at America in the year 1971 would show a politically apathetic country, focused on trying to ignore major problems by delving into the world of magic and mystery. In 1971, the Apollo 14 spaceship landed on the moon for the third time, Walt Disney was expanding his land of make believe by opening a new park in Florida, Walt Disney World, and children and adults alike were captivated by Gene Wilder portraying the eccentric chocolatier Willy Wonka in the first film adaptation of Roald Dahl’s children’s novel, *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory*.

In the world of music, Carole King was sweeping the nation with her album *Tapestry* and the power of her confessional lyrics and raw imperfect vocal style. King, a highly successful commercial songwriter of bubble gum pop coming out of the Brill Building in New York City, was stepping into the world of album-oriented music with this concept album, a genre typically dominated by White male rockers. 1971 seems in hindsight to have been a slow year for major protest musicians, with Bob Dylan and Pete Seeger both failing to release an album, while Joan Baez’s 1971 album *Blessed Are...* was largely

¹ Edgar Mitchell’s response to the question of how he viewed earth from the surface of the moon in 1971, quoted in; People Staff, “Edgar Mitchell’s Strange Voyage,” *People Magazine*, April 8th, 1974, accessed July 15th, 2017, <http://people.com/archive/edgar-mitchells-strange-voyage-vol-1-no-6/>

apolitical, the biggest hit being her cover of the Band's "The Night They Drove Old Dixie Down." At this point in time, America was also beginning to see the start of disco music, a controversial genre that by the mid to late 70s was seen as a reaction to the domination of rock music and the stigmatization of dance music by the counterculture during this period.²

With all this in mind it is easy to pass over 1971 as a stepping-stone between the searing political protests of the late 60s and the emergence of punk in the late 70s, but closer inspection shows this is clearly not the case. The year 1971 may not generally be considered politically momentous compared with 1968, for example, or 1977, the year punk emerged, which may be the reason it often gets ignored when studying protest music, but I feel this is an important reason to look at it more closely. Our focus on years like 1968 and 1977 (and other "big" years) makes us overlook events and movements that happened in "quieter" years. Genres such as funk and soul, and the mainstreaming of rock along with the proliferation of rock sub-genres, including easy rock, begin to emerge as major popular music genres in 1971, as displayed in Eric Weisbard's book *Top 40 Democracy: The Rival Mainstreams of American Music*.³ Although it is not considered a politically momentous year, 1971 led to the birth of a new kind of protest musician.

In 1971 the Isley Brothers released *Givin' it Back*, Gil Scott-Heron released *The Revolution Will Not Be Televised*, Marvin Gaye released *What's Going On*, and Sly and the Family Stone responded with the release of *There's a Riot Goin' On*, making 1971 a pivotal year for African-American protest music. These recordings demonstrate the value

² Peter Shapiro, *Turn the Beat Around: The Secret History of Disco* (London: Faber and Faber, 2006): 204-206.

³ Eric Weisbard, *Top 40 Democracy: The Rival Mainstreams of American Music* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2014): 54.

of music as an arena in which important social and political questions get asked and answered, during a particularly turbulent time in US history. Protests surrounding the Civil Rights movement were in full swing and protests in opposition to the United States' involvement in the Vietnam War were becoming increasingly radical. The ties between the movement protesting the Vietnam War and the Civil Rights movement of the 1950s and '60s are very strong. The Kent State Shooting site registration forms in the United States Department of the Interior National Park Service database, state, for example:

Collective efforts to protest America's war in Vietnam had many roots, but perhaps none so important as the civil rights movement of the 1950s and '60s. Thousands of future anti-war activists participated in, or were deeply inspired by, the boycotts, sit-ins, freedom rides, and community organizing that that comprised the mass movement to end racial discrimination in the United States.⁴

This remark identifies an interesting bridge between the two protest movements that allowed African-Americans to create politically coherent protest songs, rooted in African-American popular music styles. Histories of protest music of this period overwhelmingly celebrate White, middle-class artists inspired by the 1930s leftwing ballads of Woody Guthrie, such as, Pete Seeger, Joan Baez, and Bob Dylan.

Pete Seeger is, for example, often thought of as the quintessential American protest musician. Seeger was born into a family of high musical pedigree, with his mother, father, and stepmother being highly educated and respected musicians; Seeger's father was a founding member of the American Musicological Society; his mother was a concert violinist and a teacher at the Juilliard School of Music; while his stepmother Ruth Crawford Seeger is considered one of the most important modernist composers in the

⁴ United States Department of the Interior National Park Service, "National Register of Historic Places Registration Form," May 4, 1970, Kent State Shootings Site, accessed November 15th 2015, http://www.nps.gov/nr/feature/weekly_features/2010/KentStateShootingSite.pdf.

USA.⁵ With musical roots such as these it is no surprise that Seeger became an influential musician in America, although it is perhaps surprising that someone with his pedigree would champion folk music. Seeger had a long-standing musical career starting with his work in the Almanac singers, as part of the Communist Party USA, from 1941 – 1943, with people such as Woody Guthrie and Lee Hays (other prominent protest musicians of the time), until his recent death in January of 2014.⁶ During his musical career Seeger was no stranger to the protest music scene, writing songs in support of international disarmament, civil rights, counterculture, and environmental causes.⁷ Seeger's outspoken vigilance on prominent political issues throughout his lifetime is the main reason people identify him as the quintessential American protest musician.

One song of great importance throughout Seeger's career is the song "Where Have All the Flowers Gone." In an interview with Seeger he explains how "Where Have All the Flowers Gone" came to be,

I had been reading a long novel—"And Quiet Flows the Don"—about the Don River in Russia and the Cossacks who lived along it in the 19th century. It describes the Cossack soldiers galloping off to join the Czar's army, singing as they go. Three lines from a song are quoted in the book: 'Where are the flowers? The girls plucked them / Where are the girls? They're all married / Where are the men? They're all in the army.' I never got around to looking up the song, but I wrote down those three lines. Later, in an airplane, I was dozing, and it occurred to me that the line 'long time passing'—which I had also written in a notebook—would sing well. Then I thought, 'When will we ever learn.' Suddenly, within 20 minutes, I had a song. There were just three verses. I Scotch-taped the song to a microphone and sang it at Oberlin College. This was in 1955. One of the students there had a summer job as a camp counselor. He

⁵ David King Dunaway, *How Can I Keep From Singing? The Ballad of Pete Seeger* (New York: Villard Books, 2008): 19-22.

⁶ Allan M. Winkler, *To Everything There is a Season: Pete Seeger and the Power of Song* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009): 28-29.

⁷ Ronald D. Cohen and James Capaldi, *The Pete Seeger Reader* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014): 166.

took the song to the camp and sang it to the kids. It was very short. He gave it rhythm, which I hadn't done. The kids played around with it, singing 'Where have all the counselors gone? / Open curfew, everyone.' The counselor added two actual verses: 'Where have all the soldiers gone? / Gone to graveyards every one / Where have all the graveyards gone? / Covered with flowers every one.' Joe Hickerson is his name, and I give him 20 percent of the royalties. That song still brings in thousands of dollars from all around the world.⁸

Using the traditional Cossack folk song as a basis for his lyrics gave the song a historical context. Soldiers singing their way to slaughter in the Czar's army is very much like how drafted soldiers would be shipped off to Vietnam in 1965 to fight in the war. Setting these contextualized lyrics to a descending melodic line, as seen below, only enhances the theme of death within the song.



Figure 1.1 Main melodic line in “Where Have All The Flowers Gone”

The constant descent towards the tonic, draws on a standard musical figure used in laments, and suggests the imminent death of the soldiers. The song also features a very sparse banjo accompaniment that switches from individually plucked notes to basic strummed chords in support of the melodic line. Lastly, the slow tempo, accompanied with long legato and lyrical lines, combined with Seeger's almost sorrowful voice give the song a melancholy feel. This melancholic feeling gives the major tonality of the song a sad effect, which is consistent with the theme of death in the lyrics.

Seeger's recollection positions the first performance of the song at a very significant location, in a summer camp associated with Oberlin College. The Anti-

⁸ Pete Seeger, “Pete Seeger on the writing of ‘Where Have All the Flowers Gone,’” *Performing Songwriter*, November 2008, Issue 113, 92-93.

Vietnam War movement was primarily a youth movement, so being banned from radio and t.v., and forced to play at universities actually worked against the government in trying to stop Seeger from forwarding his message. Oberlin College is a very left-leaning liberal arts college, so naturally it is a place where Seeger would fit in and where his political messages would be well received.⁹ At Oberlin College, Seeger was able to get his new song out to a wide audience, which led to one student taking the song and expanding on it at a summer camp. Not only does this show the importance of Seeger singing his messages to young people, but it also demonstrates the portability of his song within the circles of middle-class, educated, and privileged youth, which in turn makes it an easily accessible protest song.

Seeger gave 20% of the royalties from “Where Have All the Flowers Gone” to Joe Hickerson, the student who took his song, wrote verses four and five, and performed it to many students around campfires at the summer camp, Camp Woodland, where he worked.¹⁰ Although it can be argued that Hickerson deserved the royalties, by no means did Seeger have to include him as a part writer of the song, and the fact that he did shows his support of equality and rejection of capitalist ideology. Seeger also came from a family of privilege, so he could afford to be gracious as his quality of life never depended on earning an income from his music. Seeger’s music was always looking out for what was best in America, and he focused on issues of great importance to the American people. Seeger’s music effected change in many different political movements including the civil rights movement, various movements against environmental issues, and in the case of “Where Have All the Flowers Gone,” the anti-war movement against Americans

⁹ Sarah LeBaron, *Oberlin College: Off the Record, Students Speak Out* (Pittsburgh: College Power, 2005): 74.

¹⁰ Dunaway, *How Can I Keep From Singing*, 229.

involvement in Vietnam. Throughout this time, despite being blacklisted by the American government and facing possible jail time, Seeger remained a musician for the American people.

The problem created when we associate folk music with someone like Seeger without acknowledging the wealth and privilege that enabled his political courage, and accept the convention of protest music as the music of earnest, collegiate White youth is that we emphasize the political agency and intellect of White musicians. In this assessment, our positioning of politically outspoken Black musicians in genres such as soul, R&B, or funk identifies by their musical language first and foremost and overlooks their sophisticated political analysis. More specifically we identify White musicians by their political goals and content of their music, which defines them as protest singers, while the political ideals of Black musicians are seen as secondary interest. Why is it that when we think of protest speakers our minds immediately go to the likes of Malcolm X, Bobby Seale, and Martin Luther King, but when we think of protest musicians we only think of White folk musicians? It is racial logic that determines what counts as protest music, and this logic extends from the race identity of the musician to the musical language and genre. I am going to explore the broader social fallout of this inherently racist logic in determining what is protest music in 1971.

In starting this project I examined several widely-used textbooks of rock'n'roll history to determine what is considered protest music, as seen in Appendix A. It becomes clear very quickly that protest music is defined specifically as a type of folk song that delivers a topical message.¹¹ In each of the textbooks, protest music is located

¹¹ Kevin J.H. Dettmar, *Think Rock* (London: Pearson Publishing Company, 2010): 78.

in the chapter about folk music, and the discussions of protest music revolves consistently around Bob Dylan, Joan Baez, Pete Seeger, and Woody Guthrie. Furthermore, when I looked up the Isley Brothers, Marvin Gaye, and Sly and the Family Stone in the same textbooks to see how they are defined, the results were predictable. The Isley Brothers were hardly mentioned, and when they were it was in conjunction with the Beatles, who performed “Twist and Shout,” a song that was also a staple of the Isley Brothers’ repertoire. Marvin Gaye was lumped into the discussion of Motown and Barry Gordy, often defined first and foremost as a pioneer of the Motown R&B sound, even being called “A romantic balladeer” in one textbook.¹² When “What’s Going On” is discussed, the textbooks briefly mention the social and political connotations of the song and album, but always refer to it as a soul album, never as an example of protest music.

Sly and the Family Stone was a bit more difficult to categorize as most textbooks had something different to say about them, however the general consensus is that they were based in San Francisco and they are responsible for marrying the rock world with the soul world with the creation of funk. This is striking because they are praised for bringing together a distinctly White genre with a distinctly Black genre, and for breaking down many social barriers due to their interracial band, but in spite of this they are still defined by their advancements in musical language first and foremost, and as socially conscious musicians second.

Marvin Gaye’s *What’s Going On* is an iconic landmark, yet it is not often included in a discussion of protest music. Likewise, Sly and the Family Stone, merely by being a mixed-race, mixed-gender band led by a flamboyant African-American man, are

¹² David P. Szatmary and Lynsay Ripley, *Rockin’ in Time: A Social History of Rock and Roll* (London: Pearson Publishing Company, 2014): 131.

also not associated with the genre of protest music despite their clear commitment to progressive social politics. Gil Scott-Heron is often described as a poet first and a musician second. Lastly, the Isley Brothers, an older band with roots in 1950s rhythm and blues, do not seem to be on anyone's radar when discussing protest music. This distinct omission of African-American musicians and musical styles from the protest song genre guides my analysis of genre and race in American Protest music.

In chapter two of this thesis I plan to explore the work of the Isley Brothers on their 1971 album *Givin' It Back*, specifically the opening track "Ohio/Machine Gun." I look at the significance of this medley and how it works to redefine our understandings of the genre of protest music. It will show that as a protest song "Ohio/Machine Gun" by the Isley Brothers worked successfully as a protest anthem speaking out against Vietnam, while at the same time drawing attention to the many rifts created in American culture during the Vietnam War era. This chapter will also explore the work of Crosby, Stills, Nash, and Young, and Jimi Hendrix, and how the context of their music enhances the protest message of the Isley Brothers.

In chapter three of this thesis I will look at Marvin Gaye and his album *What's Going On*, with a specific focus on the first two tracks from the album, "What's Going On," and "What's Happening Brother." I will continue to explore our racialized understandings of protest music and continue to complicate the standard notions of genre, generation, and race in the 1971 protest movements. This will be done by first exploring the importance of Marvin Gaye's album in the context of the Motown sound. I will also explore the first two tracks off of the album, and how they work to successfully protest the War in Vietnam, while still skirting the politics of respectability inherent in African-

American protest at the time. Finally I will look at the response to Gaye's album, specifically the concept album released by *Sly and The Family Stone* in November of 1971, entitled "There's a Riot Going On," and how this direct response worked to validate Gaye as a true protest musician.

In the fourth chapter of this thesis I will look at Gil Scott-Heron and his song "The Revolution Will Not Be Televised." The first section will focus on Gil Scott-Heron and his roots in the Black Arts Movement in American during the late 1960s and early 70s. This will act to set up the culture in which Scott-Heron wrote his critical protest work "The Revolution Will Not Be Televised." Next, I will focus on the song itself, specifically Scott-Heron's 1971 version which was a rerecorded version of the original track that featured a full band. A discussion of Scott-Heron's distinct style will show how he laid the groundwork for many future styles of African-American music, one of the many ways he helped move a rather stagnant protest movement forward. Lastly, I will discuss some of the messages in Scott-Heron's lyrics and how they relate directly to the Vietnam War protest effort, linking him with the other more conventional protest musicians of the time. Using Scott-Heron as an example of a protest musician in 1971 will once again highlight the racialized understandings of protest music, and will continue to complicate the standard notions of genre and race with regards to the 1971 protest movements.

Finally I will conclude this thesis by offering a new definition of protest music. This definition will be more accepting of all musical styles, and will help to show that even current pop musicians can be considered protest musicians. Overall, my goal with

this thesis is to illuminate our racialized understandings of protest music and to complicate standard notions of genre, gender, generation, and race in the year 1971.

CHAPTER TWO

The Isley Brothers: “Ohio/Machine Gun”

“Music doesn’t lie. If there is something to be changed in this world, then it can only happen through music.”

- Jimi Hendrix¹

Tensions around the US involvement in Vietnam reached a climax on May 4th 1970 when the Ohio National Guard opened fire on a student protest at Kent State University. Students had been protesting the Cambodian Campaign, announced by President Nixon during a television address on April 30th.² The Ohio National Guard was called in to calm the protest, and the end result was more than 60 shots being fired by 28 guardsmen over a period of 13 seconds, killing four students, and leaving 9 others wounded, with one young man sustaining life long paralysis.³ As Doyle Greene put it in his book on rock cover songs, “The outrage over Kent State galvanized the antiwar movement, produced a surge in protests, and strengthened anti-war sentiment across America.”⁴

Just 10 days later, a police shooting at Jackson State (a historically Black University in Mississippi) killed 2 students and injured 12 others. These students had been protesting both the continued racial intimidation and harassment by White motorists

¹ Ian Peddie, *Popular Music and Human Rights: British and American Music* (Burlington: Ashgate, 2011): 2.

² Jerry M. Lewis and Thomas R. Hensley, “The May 4 Shootings At Kent State University: The Search for Historical Accuracy,” *The Ohio Council for the Social Studies Review* 34:1 (1998): 9.

³ Noah Adams, “Shots Still Reverberate for Survivors of Kent State,” *NPR, History*, May 3rd, 2010, accessed November 3rd, 2015, <http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=126423778>.

⁴ Doyle Greene, *The Rock Cover Song: Culture, History, Politics* (Jefferson, North Carolina: McFarland & Company Inc. Publishers, 2014), 116.

traveling down Lynch Street, and also the May 4th tragedy at Kent State University.⁵ Despite the comparable scale and other connections between these protests and the violent backlash against them, the Jackson State massacre is underreported in our histories of 60s protest culture, always eclipsed by the events at Kent State. It is specifically important to mention the Jackson State shootings because it is an incident that happened at an all Black school, which is crucial when looking at a protest song created by an all Black R&B band. With the understanding of the close ties between the Vietnam War protest and the civil rights protest, as well as the importance of the Kent State shootings in provocation of anti-war protests throughout America, writing popular songs with these contexts would have a heavy effect on the popular culture of the time.

The Kent State massacre was memorialized within a month in Crosby, Stills, Nash, and Young's song "Ohio" which became a massive hit, reaching the 14th spot on the billboard hot 100, and was eventually adopted as an anti war anthem.⁶ A year later, an African-American R&B group the Isley Brothers adopted "Ohio" along with "Machine Gun," an anti-war song recorded by Jimi Hendrix, to create a medley.

The Isley Brothers thus offered tribute to the students of the Kent State shootings and to Black students killed in the lesser-known protest at Jackson State. Just as histories of the protest movement focus on Kent State over Jackson State, so too our understanding of protest music prioritizes White middle-class collegiate folk-rock styles over African-American genres and styles associated with older generations. In this chapter, I explore the significance of the Isley Brothers' medley and the way it links the genres of "protest

⁵ Rachel Krantz and Elizabeth A. Ryan, "Killings At Jackson State University," *The Biographical Dictionary of Black Americans*, accessed November 5th, 2015, http://www.aaregistry.org/historic_events/view/killings-jackson-state-university.

⁶ Billboard, "Billboard Hot 100: Crosby, Stills, Nash, and Young Chart History," *Billboard*, accessed March 3rd, 2017, <http://www.billboard.com/artist/299785/crosby-stills-nash-young/chart>.

music” to soul, R&B, and gospel styles. I ask why artists like the Isley Brothers are seldom counted as protest singers, and I consider how these musicians might have navigated “the politics of respectability” to voice their opposition to state brutality at home and abroad.

Crosby, Stills, Nash, and Young – “Ohio”

The importance of the Kent State Shootings had a great effect on CSNY, specifically their newest member, the Canadian, Neil Young. Neil Young had only recently come to the US, famously driving his hearse across the continent to look for Stephen Stills in LA, and he had no green card until 1970. Much of the work he did for CSNY was thus done illegally without a work permit, and there is some irony in the fact that one of the most famous American protest songs about Vietnam was written by a Canadian.⁷ Neil Young wrote the lyrics to “Ohio” after seeing the iconic photos of the incident in *Life Magazine* published on May 15th 1970.⁸ Just weeks after the shooting, CSNY found themselves at The Record Plant in Los Angeles, with world renowned recording engineer Bill Halverson, recording “Ohio” and rush releasing it through Atlantic records to get the song out to the public as quickly as possible.⁹ In an interview with Tony Bittick, Bill Halverson had this to say about the recording session, “I don’t recall us doing more than two or three takes of it with live vocals and live harmonies, and

⁷ Cameron Crowe, “Neil Young: The Rolling Stone Interview,” *Rolling Stone Magazine*, August 14, 1975, accessed on November 6th, 2015, <http://www.rollingstone.com/music/news/so-hard-to-make-arrangements-for-yourself-the-rolling-stone-interview-with-neil-young-19750814?page=3>.

⁸ Jimmy McDonough, *Shakey: Neil Young’s Biography* (London: Jonathan Cape, 2002), 221.

⁹ Rock and Roll Hall of Fame, “The Story of ‘Ohio’,” accessed November 10th, 2015, <http://rockhall.com/blog/post/crosby-stills-nash-young-ohio-kent-state-shooting/>.

everybody chiming in... The mood was very intense.”¹⁰ In his 1977 greatest hits compilation “Decade,” Neil Young’s hand-written liner notes about “Ohio”, remark that, “It’s still hard to believe I had to write this song. It’s ironic I capitalized on the death of those American students. Probably the biggest lesson learned at an American place of learning. My best CSNY cut. Recorded totally live in Los Angeles. David Crosby cried after this take.”¹¹

All of the emotion and intensity that has been described surrounding “Ohio” and the Kent State Shootings really shines through in the actual musical materials of the song. In contrast to the gentle style of many other CSNY songs, “Ohio” is fueled by an energetic and electrified guitar riff building dramatic tension even before the iconic lyrics are heard. The fact that the song was recorded live contributes to the immediacy and sincere emotion in the strained voices of the singers. The lyrics attack the issue at hand directly, as Jimmy McDonough notes: “In ten lines, Young captured the fear, frustration and anger felt by the youth across the country and set it to a lumbering D-modal death march that hammered home the dread.”¹² In the lyrics, Young names Richard Nixon, and the repeated lyric “four dead in Ohio” not only reports directly on the tragic event, but also invited listeners to sing along. Finally, the distorted D5 – F – C guitar riff that Young created, paired with his choppy rhythmic style and the Gm7 – C chorus paired with the backbeat in the drum section gives the song a great deal of noise potential that contrasts with CSNY’s skillful vocal harmonies.¹³

¹⁰ Ibid., 1.

¹¹ Neil Young, Liner notes to *Decade*, CD, Warner Bros., © and ® 1977.

¹² McDonough, *Shakey*, 346.

¹³ Greene, *Rock Cover Song*, 121.

Prior to the release of “Ohio,” Stephen Stills and Neil Young had “released a powerful protest song entitled “For What It’s Worth” in 1967 as members of Buffalo Springfield.”¹⁴ This release catapulted Young and Stills into the world of protest music as this song would come to symbolize the decade of the 1960s.¹⁵ In *The Culture Industry: Enlightenment as Mass Deception* by Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer, the prevalent argument is that the culture industry acts as a tool for the mass deception of society. Adorno and Horkheimer see the advance of mass media communication as a manipulation of the consumer, the demise of autonomous art, and the depletion of art into a capitalist market governed by mechanisms.¹⁶ This idea plays directly into the success generated by Buffalo Springfield’s “For What It’s Worth” and later CSNY’s “Ohio.” “For What It’s Worth” was used in almost every documentary and feature film, including *Forrest Gump* and Oliver Stone’s *Born of the Fourth of July*, chronicling the era of the ‘60s.¹⁷ Through mass media the song, and by association the members of the band responsible for the song, were adopted by the counterculture of the 1960s as leaders of the protest movement. This fact, coupled with CSNY’s well-received performance in front of 500,000 people at Woodstock in 1969, set the stage for “Ohio” to be thrust into the spotlight of the 1960s counterculture.

“Ohio” became both a counterculture anthem and a top 40 hit, so popular that it elicited a response directly from the US Government. Vice President Spiro Agnew, known ““for his vitriolic attacks on critics of President Richard Nixon’s Vietnam War

¹⁴ Unknown Author, “The Counterculture Era: Five Protest Songs (1956-70),” PDF, accessed November 13th, 2015, <http://www.apush-xl.com/DocumentsCOUNTERCULTURE.pdf>.

¹⁵ John Einarson and Rich Furay, *For What It’s Worth* (New York: Cooper Square Press, 2004), 1.

¹⁶ Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer, “The Culture Industry: Enlightenment as Mass Deception,” *Dialectic of Enlightenment* (1944): 120.

¹⁷ Eric Roth, *Forrest Gump*, DVD, directed by Robert Zemeckis (Los Angeles: Paramount Pictures, 1994); Ron Kovic, *Born on the Forth of July*, DVD, directed by Oliver Stone (Los Angeles: Universal Pictures, 1989).

Policy.’ [He] Famously attacked the news media as ‘impudent snobs’ for what the administration saw as their bias on the issue of the Vietnam War.”¹⁸ In response to “Ohio” reaching the Top 40, Vice President Spiro Agnew declared rock music “un-American,” which in turn discouraged many AM radio stations from giving “Ohio” any airplay.¹⁹ Overall, “Ohio” offers a strong call to those willing to stand against the war and “While misunderstandings of the events surrounding the shootings have clouded its legacy, it stands as an indicator of the cultural polarization in the country at that time.”²⁰ Cultural polarization of the period extends also to race relations.

The Isley Brothers, an Ohio soul R&B group whose career began in the mid 1950s, were an old-fashioned act by 1970, and skilled in non-confrontational, crowd-pleasing performance aesthetics. In their 1971 recording, the Isley Brothers use CSNY’s text to register their response to events taking place in their home state. The recording also incorporates Jimi Hendrix’s song “Machine Gun.”

Jimi Hendrix – “Machine Gun”

The Seattle-born Jimi Hendrix had actually been a member of the Isley Brothers, before his solo career took off in the late 60s London blues scene. “Machine Gun,” was recorded in 1970 in New York with the Band of Gypsys, one of rock’s first all-Black lineups comprised of Jimi Hendrix, bassist Billy Cox, and drummer Buddy Miles.²¹

Hendrix had earned fame in London’s White blues scene, and this stamp of approval

¹⁸ Samuel Walker, “VP Spiro Agnew: Rock Music Destroying America’s Youth!,” *Today in Civil Liberties History*, September 15th, 1970, accessed November 12th, 2015, <http://todayinclh.com/?event=vp-agnew-rock-music-destroying-americas-youth>.

¹⁹ Kim Simpson, *Early ‘70s Radio: The American Format Revolution*, (New York: The Continuum International Publishing Group, 2011),114.

²⁰ Eunice Rojas and Lindsay Michie, *Sounds of Resistance: The Role of Music in Multicultural Activism* (Santa Barbara: Praeger, 2013), 158.

²¹ Greene, *Rock Cover Song*, 121.

made it easier for him to appeal to White rock fans in his home country, so that the Band of Gypsies is paradoxically a bridge between Black and White audiences. Hendrix's ability to bridge the gap between races can be seen through his unwavering dedication to his music. In the lead up to Woodstock, Hendrix was approached by members of the Black Panthers who encouraged him to become a "brother," however "Jimi purposefully chose not to identify people by colour and instead focused on his music."²² In an article entitled "Black Sound, Black body: Jimi Hendrix, the electric guitar, and the meanings of Blackness," Steve Waksman suggests that Hendrix's eventual god-like status brought him an uncomfortable experience of fame, writing that "we find a story of contradictions embodied by Hendrix, the most public of African-American performers, whose move to surround himself with a world of sound seemed more and more an attempt to escape the entrapment of the image that surrounded his celebrity."²³ Nevertheless, Hendrix's iconic fame as a Black musician with an enormous White fan base was something that the Isley Brothers could later use to their advantage as an all Black band appropriating two songs popular in White youth culture. Waksman suggests that Hendrix's "desire to be heard, not seen; listened to, not watched," led to efforts "to remove himself from the demands of his public into a realm of pure music,"²⁴ and speak to his audiences through his guitar rather than through singing lyrics, as seen in his song "Machine Gun."

"Machine Gun" was recorded as a 12-minute jam based track, and is largely regarded as one of Hendrix's finest guitar works.²⁵ In a style very similar to his performance of "The Star Spangled Banner" at Woodstock in 1969, Hendrix plays long

²² David Moskowitz, *The Words and Music of Jimi Hendrix* (Santa Barbara: Praeger, 2010), 63.

²³ Steve Waksman, "Black Sound, Black Body: Jimi Hendrix, the Electric Guitar, and the Meaning of Blackness" *Popular Music and Society* 23:1 (1999): 77.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 109.

²⁵ Rotimi Ogunjobi, *The Essential Jimi Hendrix* (London: Tee Publishing/Redbridge Review, 2006) ,113.

percussive solos, to evoke the sounds of helicopters, bombs exploding, machine gun blasts, and the screams and cries of wounded soldiers. Rotimi Ogunjobi had this to say of Hendrix's sound in *The Essential Jimi Hendrix*: "Hendrix's sound is a unique blend of high volume and high power, precise control of feedback and a range of cutting edge guitar effects, especially the UniVibe-Octavia combination."²⁶ Band of Gypsy's recording engineer Tommy Erdelyi, recalls the power and controlled feedback of songs like "Machine Gun" in which Hendrix's guitar, blowing at top volume through three stacks of Marshall speaker cabinets, shook the control-room window. David E. James notes that, "Jimi Hendrix's "Machine Gun" (1970), which was dedicated to fighting men in Chicago, Milwaukee, and Vietnam, epitomized the ambiguity of the ecstatic energy of destruction that allowed rock and the war to become interchangeable metaphors for each other."²⁷ But while "Machine Gun" clearly protests the Vietnam War, Hendrix used minimal lyrics, connecting to listeners instead through the vivid storytelling of guitar sounds.

The sparse lyrics of "Machine Gun" depict a soldier fighting with phrases such as "Machine gun, tearin' my body all apart" and "Evil man make me kill you."²⁸ Hendrix could easily imagine himself a soldier as he had done army service in the early 1960s, albeit without experiencing combat. During his service, Hendrix formed a friendship

²⁶ Ogunjobi, *The Essential Jimi Hendrix*, 35.

²⁷ David E. James, "The Vietnam War and American Music," *Social Text* 23 (1989): 134-135.

²⁸ Jimi Hendrix, *Band of Gypsies, Live*, CD, EMI – Capitol Entertainment, Original recording reissued, © and © 1997.

with Billy Cox, whom he later sought out to be the bassist in Band of Gypsys and who contributes to this track.²⁹

Nevertheless, the specific critique of “Machine Gun” is easily ignored by listeners entranced by Hendrix’s virtuosic playing and explosive sound imagery. Hendrix’s virtuosity and oppositionality made him a symbol of the 1960s counterculture that was undoubtedly commodified, appropriated, and even distorted during his lifetime. Hendrix and his revision of the guitar sound to include a protest context that was adopted by the counterculture of the 1960s bears comparison with Tricia Rose’s analysis of hip hop culture, and specifically her observation that “hip hop has always been articulated via commodities and engaged in the revision of meanings attached to them.”³⁰ As well Dick Hebdige notes that dominant culture incorporates the aesthetics of political struggle, “it is very difficult to sustain any absolute distinction between commercial exploitation on the one hand and creativity and originality on the other hand.”³¹ Hendrix, acclaimed for his virtuosity but also fetishized as a Black blues man in the White realm of rock culture, becomes elevated as a protest hero even if the content of his political messages is overlooked. Nevertheless his reputation as a counterculture icon and his success bridging White and Black audiences after coming up in the African-American milieu of R&B are pertinent to understanding why the Isley Brothers would include “Machine Gun” in their medley of 1971.

²⁹ Unknown Author, “Famous Veterans: Jimi Hendrix,” *Veteran Employment Centre*, accessed November 5th, 2015, <http://www.military.com/veteran-jobs/career-advice/military-transition/famous-veterans-jimi-hendrix.html>.

³⁰ Tricia Rose, *Black Noise: Black Culture in Contemporary America* (Hanover: Wesleyan University Press, 1994): 41.

³¹ Dick Hebdige, *Subculture: The Meaning of Style* (London: Routledge, 1979): 94-95.

The Isley Brothers – “Ohio/Machine Gun”

By the time the Isley Brothers released “Ohio/Machine Gun,” they had formed their own independent label, known as T-Neck Records, and were attempting to cross over into the pop/rock market.³² These two songs were both popular with the counterculture youth audiences, both had direct personal connections to the band members, and were carefully chosen to facilitate their movement into the pop music world. The Isley Brothers medley begins with “Ohio,” but in a slower, more contemplative performance than CSNY’s blistering original recording. The Isley Brothers had, of course, a year to process the incident, while CSNY was writing their song directly after the shootings. The Isley Brothers’ 1971 performance of a song about their home stage has a more mellow sound, but nevertheless represents their opposition to the war and the backlash against Kent State protesters. “Ohio/Machine Gun” starts with a militaristic march on a snare drum, soon joined by an organ playing the D5 – F – G riff heard in the original version. The next section features a sort of call and response section between the soulful vocals of the lead singer and the various patterns on the guitar, the soul-like pitch bending and the distorted, copycat rendition of the original material.

There is a crucial lyrical adjustment made here by the Isley Brothers. The original lyrics by CSNY are “tin soldiers and Nixon coming,”³³ but the Isley Brothers change the lyrics to read “I seen tin soldiers, I hear them coming.”³⁴ The reluctance to name Nixon is perhaps an effort to widen responsibility for the ongoing war and avoid the convenience of scapegoating one man, but it may also participate in the respectability politics

³² Greene, *Rock Cover Song*, 121.

³³ Crosby, Stills, Nash, and Young. *4 Way Street*. CD. Atlantic Recording Corporation. Original recording reissued. © and ℗ 1992.

³⁴ The Isley Brothers. *Givin’ It Back*. CD. Buddha Records. © and ℗ 1971.

examined in the work of scholars such as Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham and writers such as Ralph Ellison.

The lead guitar line from “Ohio” is played next amidst bouts of ad-libbed lyrics by the lead vocalist. According to Doyle Greene, “a crucial difference [between the original and the Isley Brothers version] is a driving, tumultuous, syncopated break punctuated by lead vocal ad-libs – a musical signifier of the moment of massacre and ensuing chaos.”³⁵ Another distinct difference is the soul-like singing in a tormented way, compared to the more hard rock screaming of the vocal lines in the *CSNY* version of the song. After a few more returns of the main guitar riff, coupled with ad-libbed lyrics, *the Isley Brothers* begin a group chant shouting out against the Kent State shootings that builds in intensity until the song moves into “Machine Gun.” The transition into “Machine Gun” features the main guitar riff from the original Jimi Hendrix version of the song.

The lyrical changes in the “Machine Gun” section of “Ohio/Machine Gun” tell a story of a war zone with bullets flying, and people dying. There is also a reference to the gospel song “Swing Low Sweet Chariot,” and a second voice recites a bible verse. I find an interesting connection between the bible verse in the “Machine Gun” section, and the use of Organ in the “Ohio” section. These subtle musical elements bring a great deal of religious connotations to the music, something that is not seen in either of the original versions.

It is extremely important to discuss the role gospel music plays in the history of African-American protest music. During the slave trade in America there was a mass

³⁵ Greene, *Rock Cover Song*, 121.

movement to convert Africans to Christianity. In doing this, the Americans forced their traditional European hymns on the Africans. In their musical genius, the members of the African musical community took these hymns, like “Amazing Grace,” and made them their own by stretching the time signature and syncopating the rhythms. Rhythmic patterns, specifically those played on drums, and harmonies were essential parts of the African tradition. In African-American churches, there had to be music, a preacher, and a congregation, all participating in the service, which is where the idea of shout choruses and call and response comes from.

The use of the drum was also vitally important in African culture, and when the slave owners took away their drums, it forced the African-Americans to find new ways to incorporate percussion, which is where foot stomping and hand clapping took over. In the BBC documentary *The Story of Gospel Music: The Power in the Voice*, Rev. Dr. Wyatt Tee Walker says “Rhythm and beat is secondary to the message in gospel [...] when you sing a gospel song which is our heritage we must be able to pass it on. You can pass it on in two ways, verbal, and written. If you are going to verbalize it, it must be articulated in a way that people can understand it.”³⁶ This is important because it shows that gospel music is focused on the message, like protest music, and that it is easily digested by an audience, a main goal of a protest song. In addition to this, Rev. Walker says that “as they moved African-Americans needed new worship that addressed their struggles and hardships at that time and in those places.”³⁷ It is not farfetched to read the African-American’s need for protest songs in 1971, as an extension of new worship to address the issues within their community. Likewise, Dr. Clarence Horace Boyer, in the

³⁶ *The Story of Gospel Music: The Power in the Voice*, DVD, Directed by Andrew Dunn and James Marsh, BBC Documentaries, 1998.

³⁷ Ibid.

same documentary goes on to say, “If you listen to what Black people are singing religiously it is a clue as to what is happening to them sociologically. Our music mirrors not only theology upon which our faith is grounded but it also gives a clue as to what is happening to us.”³⁸ This sums up why having a gospel influence in the song is so important to the African-American protest movement. Gospel music was the original African-American protest, and going back to the roots of Black protest music allows African-American protest musicians like the Isley Brothers to create authentically Black protest anthems.

The rest of the “Machine Gun” section focuses on two distinct voices, one describing the carnage of war, and another asking for forgiveness. The music here is taken directly from Hendrix’s original recording as the drums and guitar play the machine gun-like rhythm in various patterns. The song finally ends with a return to the “Ohio” chorus before it fades out. According to a 1997 article in *Vibe* magazine, *the Isley Brothers* “tortured covers of Neil Young’s “Ohio” and Jimi Hendrix’s “Machine Gun” on 1971’s *Givin’ It Back* express gut-wrenching anguish over the tragic killings at Kent State, even as they ask the Lord’s forgiveness for the assailants.”³⁹

After looking deeply into the structure of the Isley Brothers song, it becomes clear that they used “Ohio” and “Machine Gun” for their contextual histories, but they further the anti-war sentiment by introducing a soul-based way of playing the music, and by changing the lyrics to tell a slightly different story with religious tones. According to Doyle Greene,

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Joyce E. Davis, “The Isley Brothers ‘The Brothers: Isley’ ‘Get Into Something’ ‘Givin’ It Back’ ‘Brother, Brother, Brother,’” *Vibe Magazine*, August 1997, 150.

“*The Isley Brothers*’ version of “Ohio” juxtaposed with “Machine Gun” represents a multiplicity of political driftings: between America and Vietnam, between White and Black, between demonstrators and soldiers, between peace and war, between racism and nationalism, between campuses and rice fields, between ghettos and villages. Within these drifts, the commonality was death.”⁴⁰

I find this point to ring very true, especially with the contexts of the original songs. A White Canadian musician wrote “Ohio” about atrocities on the home front in America, and “Machine Gun” was an almost violent representation of the Vietnam Conflict overseas, as performed by a Black musician. The split between the geographical areas as well as the split in races lines truly represent a rift in American culture.

However, the rift can be looked at from another angle as well. “Ohio/Machine Gun” is the opening song on the Isley Brothers album “Givin’ It Back,” and it sets the album up to jar the listener by focusing on two major events of bloodshed in America. This encourages the listener to recall things such as the Kent State shootings and the Jackson State shootings, as well as the bloody Vietnam War, and to recognize a rift that is created between the Black and White protest cultures in America. Bruce Edger notes that,

“In music, too, there was a lot of division; Blacks usually don’t resonate as top artists in the White world and, in particular, were oblivious to (and even resentful of) the adoration accorded Jimi Hendrix by the White community. So, when the Isley Brothers – whose appeal among Black audiences was unimpeachable – opened *Givin’ It Back* with a conflation of Neil Young’s “Ohio” and Jimi’s “Machine Gun,” they were speaking to anger and bloodshed in the streets, but they were also performing an act of outreach that was about as radical as any they could have committed in 1971.”⁴¹

This quote sums up the importance of *the Isley Brothers* in the musical world at the time as well as the significance behind the songs they chose to represent their anti-war stance

⁴⁰ Greene, *Rock Cover Song*, 123.

⁴¹ Gulla, *Icons of R&B*, 200.

against American involvement in Vietnam. A clear line can be drawn to tie all the artists together under one umbrella, as protest musicians, regardless of race, gender, generation, or musical style.

In conclusion, it is fair to say that through looking at “Ohio” by CSNY, “Machine Gun” by Jimi Hendrix, and “Ohio/Machine Gun” by the Isley Brothers it is clear that the Kent State shootings created a schism in American culture, a schism that is captured by the searing protest anthem created by the Isley Brothers and their opening track on the album “Givin’ It Back.” This chapter worked to position “Ohio” by CSNY as a protest song by a White band for a White group of people, that could be appropriated for its message about the polarization of the American culture between the home front and the battle front. It showed that as a protest song “Ohio/Machine Gun” by the Isley Brothers worked successfully as a protest anthem speaking out against Vietnam, while at the same time drawing attention to the many rifts created in American culture during the Vietnam War era. Lastly, it focused on the necessity of Jimi Hendrix as a cross-over musician between the races and how he allowed the Isley Brothers to speak to a wider audience, giving voice to the African-American community using the language of White rock culture.

CHAPTER THREE

Marvin Gaye: *What's Going On*

“An artist, if he is truly an artist, is only interested in one thing and that is to wake up the minds of men, to have mankind and womankind realize that there is something greater than what we see on the surface.”

- Marvin Gaye¹

Imagine being drafted into a war, fighting based on principles that you don't agree with, flying thousands of miles to a foreign country only to be shot at, yelled at, and over-worked, and then returning, with scars both physical and emotional to find that things are just as bad at home. This was the reality of many young men in America during the Vietnam War era, albeit more so for the young African-American men.² For this reason, Marvin Gaye chose to report on his brother's experiences in Vietnam by creating the album *What's Going On*, the first rhythm and blues concept album deeply rooted in political protest. Gaye's album is widely regarded as one of the best soul and R&B albums of all time, being ranked 6th on *Rolling Stone Magazine's* top 500 albums list in 2012.³ The title track “What's Going On”, was also ranked 4th out of 500 on *Rolling*

¹ Marvin Gaye speaking in, Richard Olivier, *Marvin Gaye: Transit Ostende*, Documentary, Directed by Richard Olivier, Belgium: Olivier Films, 1982.

² For more information on the experience of Vietnam War veterans, see: Jerry Lembcke, *The Splitting Image: Myth, Memory, and the Legacy of Vietnam* (New York: New York University Press, 1998); Mark Boulton, *Failing Our Veterans: The G.I. Bill and the Vietnam Generation* (New York: New York University Press, 2014); and James Wright. *Enduring Vietnam: An American Generation and Its War* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2017).

³ “500 Greatest Albums of All Time” last modified in 2012, <http://www.rollingstone.com/music/lists/500-greatest-albums-of-all-time-20120531/marvin-gaye-whats-going-on-20120524>.

Stone's Greatest songs of all time list in 2011.⁴ Lastly, Gaye himself was ranked 18th on *Rolling Stone's* list, "100 Greatest Artists of All Time," in 2010.⁵

Despite the very obvious success of Gaye's album on a national scale, that on April 10th 1971 *What's Going On* reached the second spot on the Billboard Hot 100, a chart that it remained on for a total of 15 weeks, there is one distinct issue that I have with how it has been received.⁶ Much like The Isley Brother's work on "Ohio/Machine Gun," Gaye's album is considered first and foremost as soul, funk, R&B, and in some cases even as pop music before it is ever considered as protest music. Gaye's album is littered with messages of political protest on a number of issues ranging from the war in Vietnam to global warming and climate control, yet when we turn to look at *Rolling Stone's* 2014 list "The 10 Best Protest Songs of All Time," Marvin Gaye's work is nowhere to be seen, while four Bob Dylan songs are included.⁷ In fact, not a single African-American artist makes the list, despite the very rich history of protest music coming from the African-American community. An argument could be made that this list is only for protest singers who play the typical folk rock style common in protest music, but if that is the case, the omission of black protest musicians like Richie Havens and Odetta who were champions of the folk music style is still unacceptable. When we hear the searing protest of African-American artists such as Gaye, Nina Simone, Curtis

⁴ "500 Greatest Songs of All Time," last modified in 2011, <http://www.rollingstone.com/music/lists/the-500-greatest-songs-of-all-time-20110407>

⁵ "100 Greatest Artists of All Time," last modified in 2010, <http://www.rollingstone.com/music/lists/100-greatest-artists-of-all-time-19691231>

I used Rolling Stone for all three lists for the sake of consistency, however I do acknowledge that their lists are often highly debated and that they do tend to omit some very influential artists, albums, and songs for reasons unbeknownst to the general public.

⁶ Billboard, "Billboard Hot 100: Marvin Gaye Chart History," *Billboard*, accessed March 3rd, 2017, <http://www.billboard.com/artist/309807/marvin-gaye/chart?f=379>

⁷ "10 Best Protest Songs of All Time," last modified in 2014, <http://www.rollingstone.com/music/lists/readers-poll-the-10-best-protest-songs-of-all-time-20141203>

Mayfield, Sly Stone, and more, and then witness their total absence from a list of protest songs curated by the dominant arbiter of popular music in the US, we must confront a profound cultural disconnect.

The purpose of this chapter is to use Marvin Gaye's album *What's Going On* to explore our racialized understandings of protest music and to continue to complicate the standard notions of genre, generation, and race in the 1971 protest movements. This will be done by first exploring the importance of Marvin Gaye's album in the context of the Motown sound. Looking at the history of the Motown Company and how *What's Going On*, fits into the big picture of products coming out of Detroit leading up to 1971 will be the first step in determining the depth of Gaye's work in terms of protest. Next, I will explore the first two tracks on the album, and how they work to successfully protest the War in Vietnam, while still skirting the politics of respectability inherent in African-American protest at the time. Finally, I will look at the response to Gaye's album, specifically the concept album released by Sly and The Family Stone in November of 1971, entitled "There's a Riot Going On," and how this direct response worked to validate Gaye as a true protest musician.

Berry Gordy and the History of Motown

Berry Gordy Jr. started Motown as a small company known as Tamla Records on January 12th 1959. From this date until the year 1972 Motown operated out of Hitsville U.S.A, a small office building located at 2648 West Grand Boulevard in the heart of Detroit, Michigan.⁸ The production nature of the Motown Company and the location it

⁸ "History of Motown," last modified in 2017, <https://www.motownmuseum.org/story/motown/>.

had within the United States all play huge roles in determining why Gordy was so successful at creating number one hits. Detroit was the birthplace of the Ford Motor Company and the industrialization of the auto industry, and quickly became known as the world's automotive capital, earning its nickname "The Motor City." Gordy got much of his inspiration from the auto industry in Detroit, demonstrated clearly in his choice of the name "Motown."

More than just naming his record company after the famed city in which it existed, Gordy tried his best to emulate the production style developed by Henry Ford in 1913, known as the assembly line.⁹ Gordy's production process has often been described as factory-like, and indeed he himself had worked on the production line at the Mercury-Lincoln auto factory when he first moved to Detroit.¹⁰ Gordy is even quoted as saying, "Every day I watched how a bare metal frame, rolling down the line would come off the other end, a spanking brand new car. What a great idea! Maybe, I could do the same thing with music. Create a place where a kid off the street could walk in one door, an unknown, go through the same process, and come out another door, a star."¹¹ That is exactly what Gordy did with Motown.

Detroit's industry and history, however, plays into the history of Motown in more than just name. As you will see later in a discussion of the Motown sound, there was a distinct focus in Motown of moving away from the rhythm and blues style towards a pop aesthetic that would appeal to both Black and White audiences. This movement is part of a larger cultural movement in America at the time called the Great Migration. The Great

⁹ "A Science Odyssey: People and Discoveries," last modified in 1998, <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/aso/databank/entries/dt13as.html>

¹⁰ "History of Motown," last modified in 2017, <https://www.motownmuseum.org/story/motown/>.

¹¹ "History of Motown," last modified in 2017, <https://www.motownmuseum.org/story/motown/>.

Migration was the movement of 6 million African-Americans out of the rural Southern United States to the urban Northeast, Midwest, and West that occurred between 1910 and 1970.¹² Until 1910, more than 90% of the African-American population lived in the American South.¹³ In 1900, only one-fifth of African-Americans living in the South were living in urban areas.¹⁴ By the end of the Great Migration, 53% of the African-American population remained in the South, while 40% lived in the North, and 7% in the West, and the African-American population had become highly urbanized. By 1970, more than 80% of African-Americans lived in cities, and by 1960, of those African-Americans still living in the South, half now lived in urban areas.¹⁵ Like the movement their parents made from rural southern cities to urban northern ones, the Motown singers and songwriters, led by Berry Gordy himself, focused on a movement from the rhythm and blues music of the south to pop music of the urbanized north. The children of the Great Migration generation wanted music that articulated their modern, urban, northern experience, and their tastes rejected the rough country blues they associated with southern, rural poverty. Ironically, that sound was being embraced eagerly by British youth and White American teens who thought that pop music was slick, polished, and spiritually empty.

Motown also played an important role in the racial integration of popular music, as it was an African-American owned record label that achieved significant crossover success. Motown defined the term crossover not only on record and stage but also behind the scenes. After breaking down barriers and having pop radio embrace Motown artists,

¹² Campbell Gibson and Kay Jung, "Populist Division: Historical Census Statistics On Population Totals By Race, 1790 to 1990," U.S. Census Bureau, Washington DC, September 2002. 5-6.

http://mapmaker.rutgers.edu/REFERENCE/Hist_Pop_stats.pdf

¹³ Ibid., 5-6.

¹⁴ Karl E. Taeuber and Alma F. Taeuber, "The Negro Population in the United States," in John P. Davis *The American Negro Reference Book* (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 1966): 122.

¹⁵ "The Second Great Migration," last modified in <http://www.inmotionaame.org/print.cfm;jsessionid=f830444661458729315793?migration=9&bhcp=1>

Berry Gordy moved into television and movies.¹⁶ He booked popular artists on shows such as *American Bandstand* and the *Ed Sullivan Show* and captivated national audiences with repeat performances on these shows.¹⁷ Motown was the first African-American owned record label to reach widespread national acclaim and Motown broke down racial prejudice by becoming the most successful independent record company in history and the most successful African-American owned business in America.¹⁸

Possibly the single biggest aspect that made Motown so successful through the 1960s and into the 1970s is The Motown Sound, a type of soul/pop music that was Berry Gordy's trademark. Motown's distinctive sound came from Gordy's strict policy of using the same teams of songwriters and producers, the same musicians, and the same studio for virtually every recording.¹⁹ The Motown sound can be defined by a number of its specific characteristics. The basic pulse of the music is articulated by a variety of instruments from the tambourine to handclaps and foot stomps (as seen in many gospel music traditions), and is featured very prominently in the mix. The lead instrument is ordinarily an instrument not usually associated with rock or rhythm and blues, such as the bassoon, English horn, or vibraphone. The production of Motown songs tends to emphasize the lead singer in the mix, and the bass lines found in Motown songs tend to be more tonally developed utilizing chromaticism to create more complex runs and complicating the standard rhythmic purpose of the bass. Lastly, the lyrics used complex

¹⁶ "History of Motown," last modified in 2017, <https://www.motownmuseum.org/story/motown/>.

¹⁷ "History of Motown," last modified in 2017, <https://www.motownmuseum.org/story/motown/>.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Suzanne Smith, *Dancing in the Street: Motown and the Cultural Politics of Detroit* (Harvard University Press: Cambridge Massachusetts, 1999): 156-157.

poetic techniques such as rhyme, alliteration, and metaphors, and the songs usually had multiple hooks. In 1971, Jon Landau wrote in *Rolling Stone*:

“What was the Motown sound? In its heyday, in the middle Sixties, it consisted of: 1) simply structured songs with sophisticated melodies and chord changes, 2) a relentless four-beat drum pattern, 3) a gospel use of background voices, vaguely derived from the style of the Impressions, 4) a regular and sophisticated use of both horns and strings, 5) lead singers who were half way between pop and gospel music, 6) a group of accompanying musicians who were among the most dextrous, knowledgeable, and brilliant in all of popular music (Motown bassists have long been the envy of white rock bassists) and 7) a trebly style of mixing that relied heavily on electronic limiting and equalizing (boosting the high range frequencies) to give the overall product a distinctive sound, particularly effective for broadcast over AM radio.”²⁰

Gordy also worked tirelessly to ensure quality control at Motown, another production aspect he picked up from the auto industry in Detroit. According to the Motown Museum, “meetings were held on Friday mornings where producers would submit their product to be voted on.”²¹ These meetings were put in place to ensure only the highest quality material and performances were released to the public, and were a crucial reason why Motown generated so many number one hits on the billboard charts. Part of Gordy’s work to present nothing but the best image to the public also involved sending his performers to a “charm school” in order to groom their image. According to an article in *Jazziz* magazine, “Motown artists were advised that their breakthrough into the White popular music market made them ambassadors for other African-American artists seeking broad market acceptance, and that they should think, act, walk and talk like royalty, so as to alter the less-than-dignified image commonly held of Black musicians by White America in that era.” This brings about one of the main criticisms of Berry Gordy

²⁰ Jon Landau, “The Motown Story,” *Rolling Stone Magazine* May 13, 1971.
<http://www.rollingstone.com/music/features/the-motown-story-19710513>

²¹ “History of Motown,” last modified in 2017, <https://www.motownmuseum.org/story/motown/>.

and the Motown Record Company and the point where we can start to see Marvin Gaye push the boundaries of what it means to be a protest musician.

Marvin Gaye and Race at Motown

One of the major criticisms of the Motown sound is that it offers a “Whitened” version of African-American music. This “Whitened” version of African-American music is most of the time attributed to Gordy’s idea of wanting to create crossover musicians who could be successful in both the White and Black worlds of America, however as Mark MacAulay argues in his MA thesis “Black Sinatras, White Panthers: Race, Genre and Performance in Detroit Black Pop and Rock, 1960-1970,” “reading music as White-inflected typically meant an absence of identifiably African or African-American musical tropes (e.g., blue notes, call and response vocals, lyrical innuendo).”²² While Gordy was working to cultivate an image of upward mobility for his African-American performers through clear displays of Black bourgeois identity, the “Whitened” sound of Black pop seemed to project a backwards step for Black consciousness and racial identification of the time.²³ To me, this means that Gordy was producing Black music with diluted expressions of African-American musicality, music that was somehow less authentically Black than the rhythm and blues tradition that came before the birth of Motown and the Black pop genre, something I wholeheartedly disagree with. At the same time that the musicians were diluting African-American musicality they were also recording speeches by prominent civil rights leaders such as Martin Luther King and

²² Mark MacAulay “*Black Sinatras, White Pantehers: Race, Genre and Performance in Detroit Black Pop and Rock, 1960-1970*” (MA Thesis, Dalhousie University, 2007): 43.

²³ *Ibid.*, 70.

incorporating them into their music.²⁴ The fact that musicians wanted to include in their music, messages from some of the most public protest figures in the African-American community of the time, definitely shows that they were doing the opposite of watering down Blackness and producing White-friendly, bland, pop music.

Marvin Gaye's *What's Going On* complicates this view of Motown Whitewashing African-American experience, and forces us to reassess what it means to be a protest musician. Many scholars have described Motown as the perfect musical representation of the early civil rights movement.²⁵ As Motown grew into the largest Black-owned corporation in American history and made great headway into the White-dominated mainstream pop market, the civil rights movement grew and slowly started to saturate the White world with their tireless protest efforts. By 1971, civil rights protests were becoming more and more radical, as the War in Vietnam became a main protest point in both the Black and White worlds of America, and the Black pop world was beginning to embrace the musical phenomenon known as soul. As Brian Ward states in his book *Just My Soul Responding: Rhythm and Blues, Black Consciousness, and Race Relations*,

“It was also in this social, political and psychological climate that the soul phenomenon emerged, eventually encompassing most aspects of Black life to become almost synonymous with ‘negritude.’ Soul style, as manifested in distinctively Black ways of walking, talking, eating, dressing, joking, thinking, working, playing, dancing, and music making, defied easy analysis or imitation by outsiders. [...] Thus Black consumers gradually, but inexorably, began to reject White pop and some of the more obviously ‘Whitened’ Rhythm and Blues of the Black pop era: instead they increasingly embraced the ‘Blacker’ sounds of

²⁴ Gerald Early, *One Nation Under a Groove: Motown and American Culture* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2004): 84-86.

²⁵ For an in depth look at Motown's relationship with the civil rights movement and the race politics in Detroit refer to Suzanne Smith, *Dancing in the Street: Motown and the Cultural Politics of Detroit* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1999); Gerald Early, *One Nation Under a Groove: Motown and American Culture* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2004); Reebee Garofalo, “Popular Music and the Civil Rights Movement,” in *Rockin' the Boat: Mass Music & Mass Movements*, ed. Reebee Garofalo (Cambridge: South End Press, 1992).

soul music.”²⁶

Marvin Gaye, with his 1971 album *What's Going On* is moving away from the “Whitened” idea of Black pop and evolving from the pop normative at Motown Records towards the ideas of soul. Gaye’s new direction changes how early Motown music paralleled the Civil Rights Movement, and pushes it into the era of the Vietnam War protest movements.

Marvin Gaye and Masculinity

Seeing Gaye as a protest musician starts with his protest to the daily workings at Motown records. By 1971, Marvin Gaye changed his look, ditching the clean-cut college boy image so highly touted at Motown, to grow a beard and dress more casually, often wearing leisure suits.²⁷ Gaye also pierced his ear, a direct protest to the executives at Motown.²⁸ This drastic shift in appearance coupled with Gaye’s soulful and sexy vocal melodies, allowed Gaye to attract a lot of attention as a sex symbol, something he struggled to reconcile with his widely documented stage fright.²⁹ This outward shift of Black masculinity that caused Gaye to become a sex symbol is not only a direct protest to the strict dress code rules at Motown, but it is also a different side of masculinity popular amongst protest musicians. As previously stated most protest musicians who gain mainstream attention are White, middle class males, however they also seem to adhere to what I like to refer to as the Arthur Miller style of masculinity. They are White, earnest,

²⁶ Brian Ward, *Just My Soul Responding: Rhythm and Blues, Black Consciousness, and Race Relation* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1998): 182-183.

²⁷ Bob Gulla, *Icons of R&B and Soul: An Encyclopedia of the Artists Who Revolutionized Rhythm* (Greenwood Press: Westport Connecticut, 2008): 345.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 345.

²⁹ David Ritz, *Divided Soul: The Life of Marvin Gaye* (Cambridge: Da Capo Press, 1991): 101-102.

bookish, sensitive, and nerdy, and Gaye is a sexual Black man, with a soft sensual, higher pitched voice. Gaye's persona as a sex symbol in the soul community is also in direct conflict with the American political leftist ideals that show sex and pleasure have no place in serious politics. In his book entitled *The Sixties: Years of Hope, Days of Rage*, Todd Gitlin uses his first-hand account from his time as the president of the group Students for a Democratic Society (SDS) and as the organizer of the first national demonstration against the Vietnam War to shed light on one of the most tumultuous times in American history. Gitlin asks the question, "What did 'the sixties' – the movements, the spirit – accomplish?"³⁰ The answer to this question is not easy but it does shed some light on the importance of Marvin Gaye as a sex symbol and how it furthered his protest of the American government. Gitlin says,

"During the Reagan and Bush years, the prevailing answer was: *The sixties were a bust*. Or the next worse thing: something to 'put behind us' [...] here I wish only to offer a frame work for thinking about the consequences and meanings of the sixties insurgencies under four headings: social equality (race, gender, sexuality); wide-open 'life-styles' (sex, drugs, rock 'n' roll); the limitation of national violence and the care of the earth; and the spread of democratic activity."³¹

If we think about these four headings in terms of Marvin Gaye, his album *What's Going On*, and his masculinity, we can see that as a sexual Black man, who wrote songs about many political issues including global warming, he represents each and every form of sixties insurgency according to Gitlin. Even in Jack Kerouac's classic novel *On the Road* we can see signs of the White middle class desire for the status of an African-American sex symbol,

"At lilac evening I walked with every muscle aching among the lights of 27th and Welton in the Denver coloured section, wishing I were a negro, feeling the best

³⁰ Todd Gitlin, *The Sixties: Years of Hope, Days of Rage* (New York: Bantam Books, 1987): xv.

³¹ *Ibid.*, xv.

the White world had offered was not enough ecstasy for me, not enough life, joy, kicks, darkness, music, not enough night. [...] I wished I were [...] anything but what I was so drearily, a “White man” disillusioned.”³²

Challenging the strict masculinity that seems to surround protest musicians by presenting a sexual and vulnerable male is definitely one-way Gaye challenged not only Motown, but also the protest genre in general.

The Recording of What's Going On

At this time in his life Gaye began to re-embrace his spirituality, and he began to deal with his personal demons such as drug addiction, grief over the death of his long time singing partner Tammi Terrell, and, most importantly his brother Frankie's service in the Vietnam War.³³ The combination of all of these stressors placed Gaye in the position to produce a singular protest statement, readily accessible within mass consumer culture, and a statement that was decidedly more “Black” than previous albums heard coming from Motown.³⁴ For the entire recording process of *What's Going On* Gaye was going against what Gordy had spent decades building in Motown, as it was the first recording in Motown history where the performer had complete control over the production and song selection for the album. Gaye's protests against the recording habits at Motown fostered a climate of protest throughout the making of *What's Going On*, allowing Gaye to combine his personal experiences with those of the Black American public to create an authentically Black protest album. As Mark Anthony Neal states in his book *What The Music Said: Black Popular Music and Black Popular Culture*,

³² Jack Kerouac, *On the Road* (New York: Penguin Group, 1976): 179-180.

³³ Gulla, *Icons of R&B and Soul*: 345.

³⁴ Mark Anthony Neal, *What The Music Said: Black Popular Music and Black Popular Culture* (New York: Routledge, 1999): 63. Also for any bibliographic information on Marvin Gaye, the definitive biography is David Ritz, *Divided Soul: The Life of Marvin Gaye*, Cambridge: Da Capo Press, 1991.

“Gaye’s recording was released at a time when the Black protest movement and the communities of resistance within it were being altered by forces both internal and external to the African-American experience. In this regard, Gaye’s recording climaxed an era of Black protest activity as well as synthesized many narratives of protest within the African- American experience.”³⁵

Neal points to a very important factor in what makes Gaye’s album so successful as a vehicle for protesting the Vietnam War from an African-American perspective in that it synthesizes the movement, at a time when the African- American protest movement was vulnerable and in need of new leadership. In the late sixties the African-American civil rights movement suffered many devastating set backs including the Detroit riot of 1967, the long hot summer of 1967, and the assassination of Martin Luther King Jr. in 1968. The major way that Gaye was able to synthesize this movement, according to Neal, was to re-create the communities of resistance aurally. “*What’s Going On*, allowed Gaye to technologically layer his three distinct vocal ranges – falsetto, gospel shout, and smooth midrange – for the purpose of creating a Marvin Gaye choir, which metaphorically and aurally reconstructed the various communities of resistance which undergirded Black social movement in this era.”³⁶

The only reason this was made possible is because it was the first album on which Gaye was finally able to produce his own record.³⁷ This is important because it shows Gaye’s skills as a producer as well, not just as a performer. As part of his protest against Motown, Gaye produced the album himself giving him the freedom to try new things like layer his three distinct singing voices, as well as recording band mate’s conversations,

³⁵ Neal, *What The Music Said*, 63.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 63.

³⁷ Listed as producer on the vinyl

recording musicians warming up, and putting the album together himself to truly reflect his protest ideals. In Nelson George's book *Buppies, Baps, B-Boys and Bohos: Notes on Post-Soul Culture*, Stanley Crouch is quoted saying,

“[Gaye's] is a talent for which the studio must have been invented. Through over dubbing, Gaye imparted lyric, rhythmic, and emotional counterpoint to his material. The result was a swirling stream-of-consciousness that enabled him to protest, show allegiance, love, hate, dismiss, and desire in one proverbial swoop. In his way, what Gaye did was reiterate electronically the polyrhythmic African underpinnings of Black American music and reassess the domestic polyphony which is its linear extension.”³⁸

This observation echoes Neal's description of Gaye synthesizing the protest movements, and it shows that Gaye achieved this through turning back to the African roots of Black American music. Essentially Gaye worked to bring forward the age identity at Motown. Early Motown hits were songs for teenagers, about teen drama and excitement, even early Marvin Gaye songs like “Heard it through the Grapevine” (1966) were appealing to teens and young adults. With *What's Going On* Gaye reached out to the very audience that Gordy – and he himself - had so carefully cultivated and sent out his new fully mature and adult message at the specific point when the relations to the original African sounds and ideas were slowly deteriorating in the mainstream African-American culture. Gaye was changing the face of not only Black pop music coming out of Motown, but also the face of the genre that is protest music. He created a cohesive concept album that was able to enter the mass consumer world and organize the social protest movements that had become chaotic. The importance of this album in defining African-American musicians as a part of the protest music genre is stated in both *Rock: Music, Culture, and Business* and *Rock: A Canadian Perspective*,

³⁸ Nelson George, *Buppies, Baps, B-Boys and Bohos: Notes on Post-Soul Culture* (Cambridge: Da Capo Press, 2001): 212.

“Along with Stevie Wonder and Sly Stone, Marvin Gaye showed that soul and R&B albums could provide artistic coherence that transcended the three minute single; managed to bridge the divides among AM top 40, FM album-oriented radio, and the soul music market; and held open the possibility that popular music might still have something to do with social change, as well as money making and artistic self expression. As Gaye himself acknowledged, this was an example of ideas about artistry that had largely been developed within a rock context being integrated back into African-American popular music.”³⁹

Concept albums were a relatively new idea in 1971, and the fact that Gaye was able to create such an effective protest album at Motown records, a recording mecca known for its number one singles more than its album compositions, is a true testament to Gaye’s artistry.

The Birth of What’s Going On

Although *What’s Going On* has many messages of protest, I want to look specifically at the first two tracks on the album, the title track “What’s Going On,” and “What’s Happening Brother,” as they focus specifically on the protest movement connected to the anti-Vietnam War sentiment found in America at the time. These two Vietnam War protest songs will help me to redefine the genre of anti-war protest music, as they differ so greatly from the folk style of musicians like Bob Dylan and Pete Seeger. A few years after the album had been released Gaye had this to say of the album’s conception,

“In 1969 or 1970, I began to re-evaluate my whole concept of what I wanted my music to say. I was very much affected by letters my brother was sending me from Vietnam, as well as the social situation here at home. I realized that I had to put my own fantasies behind me if I wanted to write songs that would reach the souls of people. I wanted them to take a look at what was happening in the

³⁹ Joseph G. Schloss, Larry Starr, and Christopher Waterman, *Rock: Music, Culture and Business* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012):191, found also in: Larry Starr, Christopher Waterman, and Jay Hodgson, *Rock: A Canadian Perspective* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008):234.

world.”⁴⁰

This quote works to clearly identify how Marvin Gaye was thinking at the time of the album’s conception. I think it is important here to highlight how the album came about, as it plays a pivotal role in how the title track came to be, and it paints a picture of why the protest messages in Gaye’s work are so clear and important for the time.

The conception of the album begins with Obie Benson of The Four Tops. While The Four Tops were on tour in 1969 Benson witnessed the event known today as “Bloody Thursday,” where police attacked anti-Vietnam War protestors in Berkeley’s People’s Park. Benson could not believe what he saw, and began asking himself questions like “What’s going on, what’s happening here, why are they sending our kids to war overseas, and why are they attacking their own kids in the streets?”⁴¹

When Benson returned to Detroit after the tour he met with Motown songwriter Al Cleveland, and the two wrote and composed a song based on the events Benson had witnessed. I find a striking resemblance between Benson’s reaction to this event and Neil Young’s reaction to the events at Kent State, and I think the reactionary emotion going into the songs are what make them truly effective. After the song was finished Benson sent it to his band mates. The Four Tops eventually came together and agreed that the song was a protest song and that it was too political for them, despite Benson originally disagreeing and saying that it was meant to be a song about love and understanding.

Not wanting to waste the song by simply throwing it away Benson and Cleveland

⁴⁰ This quote is found in a number of different resources including Jack Ryan, *Recollections, the Detroit Years: The Motown Sound by the People who Made it* (Whitmore Lake Michigan: Glendower Media, 2012): 35; Brett Lashua, Karl Spracklen, and Stephen, Wagg *Sounds and the City: Popular Music, Place and Globalization* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014): 247; and <http://www.rollingstone.com/music/lists/500-greatest-albums-of-all-time-20120531/marvin-gaye-whats-going-on-20120524>

⁴¹ Ibid.,

offered it to Marvin Gaye. At first Gaye thought the feel of the song would suit The Originals, a band Gaye was doing writing for in 1970, but Benson and Cleveland urged him to sing it himself. Gaye responded by asking for song writing credit, and after Benson and Cleveland agreed Gaye edited the song adding a new melody, revising the song to fit his style, changing the lyrics to represent his own feelings of disgust, and finished the song by adding the title, “What’s Going On.” Benson later said that “Gaye tweaked and enriched the song, added some things that were more ghetto, more natural, which made it seem like a story and not a song... we measured him for the suit and he tailored the hell out of it.”⁴²

During this time the many social issues in America affected Gaye, and he even cites the 1965 Watts Riots as a pivotal moment in his life when he asked himself, “With the world exploding around me, how am I supposed to write love songs?”⁴³ Gaye was also affected by his brother Frankie’s experiences on the home front as a Vietnam War veteran and after Frankie explained the horrors he had seen over seas in Vietnam Gaye knew what had to be done, saying, “I didn't know how to fight before, but now I think I do. I just have to do it my way. I'm not a painter. I'm not a poet. But I can do it with music.”⁴⁴

This is what led to the creation of the title track “What’s Going On,” and is why I consider this song to be a critique of the war in Vietnam on the home front in America rather than an overtly political statement about the government’s strategies in Vietnam, set to music. Marvin Gaye uses his own personal experiences in his music as a metaphor for the larger national issues on the home front. Mark Anthony Neal argues that Gaye

⁴² Ibid.,

⁴³ Ibid.,

⁴⁴ Frankie Gaye, *Marvin Gaye: My Brother* (San Francisco: Backbeat Book, 2003): 72.

uses the nuclear family as a model for the American government in which the ruling patriarchy of the nuclear family is seen by extension as the ruling patriarchy of the nation. Neal points to Gaye's own rocky relationship with his father, which eventually resulted in Gaye's death, exemplified as Nixon's ruling over the United States. Neal states, "Gaye's critique of Patriarchy, or at least the social functions of patriarchy, counters popular expressions of Black patriarchy as a vehicle for Black empowerment in the post-Civil Rights era."⁴⁵ The proof of this is seen in the song's lyrics such as "Father, Father," "only love can conquer hate" and "don't punish me with brutality."⁴⁶

While I agree with Neal's assertion that Gaye is clearly using the nuclear family as a home front model for the larger issues within the nation, I read the story a bit differently. While Neal is focused on singling out the patriarchal figure in the song as a scapegoat for blame, I see this song as a call for the nation to unify as a big family to fight for peace. The track opens with the sounds of an urban street, signifying the context for the song. It is a call to unity for the Black people of America, so it only makes sense that it starts with a community feeling. As the song progresses the lyrics refer to the mother and father, which in my opinion is a call to the leaders of the protest movements, letting them know the position they are in is valuable and vulnerable, and that now is the time to look at *What's Going On* around them, and embrace their community to organize for peace. This is seen in the lyrics "You know we've got to find a way to bring some lovin' here today."⁴⁷ The fact that this lyric is directed at the patriarchal figure in the song is what really makes me believe Gaye is not using his song to compare with Nixon and the issues with government, but rather as a cry to codify the mass social movements.

⁴⁵ Neal, *What the Music Said*, 64.

⁴⁶ Marvin Gaye, *What's Going On* (Detroit: Motown Records, 1971).

⁴⁷ Marvin Gaye, *What's Going On* (Detroit: Motown Records, 1971).

I also see the reference to “brother” as a direct representation of the African-American community as a whole, as they so often refer to their friends as brothers, even the famous Black Panther political party called themselves brothers.

“What’s Going On” and “What’s Happening Brother”

All of these lyrical details calling for community unification are amplified in the musical materials of the song. Rather than the typical 3-minute pop hit associated with Motown, “What’s Going On” is a three and a half minute blues-based song, filled with backing vocals and shout choruses reminiscent of the gospel tradition. The song can be divided into two distinct sections, similar to the basic verse chorus pop song structure. However, unlike most pop songs, “What’s Going On,” relies on a chord structure typically found in jazz and gospel music. Written in the key of E major, the verse follows a I7, vi7, ii7, V7sus4, V7, I7 or Emaj7, c#m7, f#m7, B7sus4, B7, Emaj7 harmonic progression, seen below.

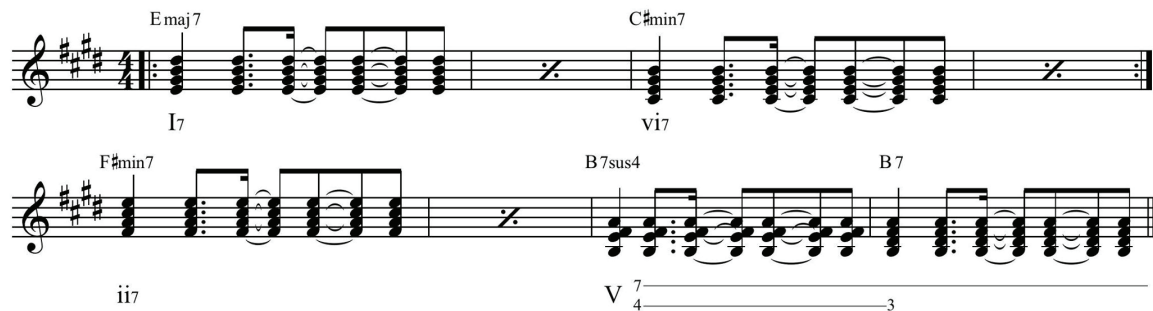


Figure 3.1 Chord progression of the verse section in “What’s Going On”

This harmonic progression is very different from the typical I – vi – V - I chord progression common in blues music. This chord progression also plays directly into the African-American roots of the song, as it is the basis for what is known as the turnaround in blues music, and is also a common chord progression used in Gospel music, as seen in

“Never Would Have Made It” by Marvin Sapp, a prominent American Gospel singer and founder of the Lighthouse Full Life Centre Church in Michigan. This use of the gospel tradition is a call back to the traditional African-American musical styles, and the earliest forms of Black protest music. The instrumentation of the song also plays into the success of the song. The song begins with a sensual solo from a soprano saxophone, leading into the first verse, which is backed by a dense percussion section. The percussion section for the song is very important because it features an array of instruments, such as drum kit, tambourine, vibraphone, bongos, and congas, which create a very African feel to the music. Drums are used in many African traditions, so utilizing more than just the traditional drumset is certainly an intentional attempt by Gaye to root the song in African culture. The urban or African musical sounds paired with the constant vocal interjections paint a true picture of urban bleakness that can only be overcome through addressing the issues discussed throughout the rest of the album.

In addition to the musical elements present in the song, I don’t feel as though Gaye is asking the question “What’s Going On?”; instead he is urging people to look at what is going on around them; to see what is happening in the world they are living in. He is also telling people what’s going on around them, he speaks of people being punished with brutality, picket lines and picket signs, to many people dying, and the escalating war effort. Neal argues that, “within the context of the historical period, Gaye’s recording is a critique of American Imperialism abroad and America’s rejection of its own democratic tenets domestically.”⁴⁸ While I agree that it is a critique of American Imperialism abroad I find it hard to believe that encouraging people to look

⁴⁸ Neal, *What The Music Said*: 65.

around them is a rejection of anything on the domestic front. Rather it is a call to arms to accept what has happened on the home front thus far, to look around and figure out where the problems lie, and work together to find solutions so that the domestic democratic tenets have a chance at turning things around.

One key feature of Gaye's album that solidifies it as a cohesive concept album is that each track bleeds into the next one to create what I refer to as a consciousness album. There is no distinct break between the songs so it allows the listeners to consciously think about each track and how the issues brought up relate to the album as a whole. This is what makes the second track on the album, "What's Happening Brother," so immediately effective. Gaye prepares the listener for a discussion of "What's Happening Brother," by first declaring "What's Going On".

"What's Happening Brother" tells a story of a soldier returning to the United States after serving a term in Vietnam and the adjustments to culture that he has to make. It was inspired by Gaye's brother Frankie's actual experience returning home after 3 years of overseas service. The major thing that drives this song forward is the bassline, played by James Jamerson. The bass in this song is constantly moving and shifting to support the story-like singing of Marvin Gaye. The bass follows a sort of theme and variation pattern, where, even when a theme is repeated, the rhythm is altered slightly to keep the listener engaged. Jamerson does a great job of using syncopated rhythms throughout the song without getting in the way of the main groove or main vocals. The main groove, once again is sustained through a dense percussion section that has a focus on the African drumming tradition. However, there is the addition of xylophone that helps support the melodic line, which is created through the use of a vocal chorus, piano,

and saxophone. The use of the vocal chorus as the main melodic device is very striking in this song as it not only ties the song to the gospel tradition but also gives the song a sense of community and unity, a direct opposition to the lyrical content. The chord structure of this song is very complex and almost chaotic at times. There are three distinct key changes throughout the piece amongst A minor, C minor, and Ab minor, and the stark contrast between the complex, rhythmic bass pattern, and the simple vocal chorus line creates a feeling of disconnect in the music that matches Gaye’s lyrical message.



Figure 3.2 Measures 21-25 of “What’s Happening Brother”

Having such a complex chord structure was most definitely Gaye’s intent, as he needed the music to match the message.

The lyrics paint a very clear picture of urban bleakness. The first major urban issue he address is the high unemployment rate, using the lyrics “Can’t find no work, can’t find no job, my friend, money is tighter than it’s ever been.” This is important because it once again shows that rather than declaring an outright political statement lashing out against the government and their treatment of the African-American communities, he is choosing to look inwards and make the listener aware of the issues, in the hope that they will use this information to combat their own battles.

The next major issue that he addresses is the disillusionment soldiers had to face when returning home. Lines like, “are things really getting better, like the newspaper

said,” and “will our ball club win the pennant, do you think they have a chance?” show how the soldier returning home was completely unprepared to face the political climate on the home front. The newspapers did their best to paint pictures describing soldiers returning home as the greatest moment of their lives, however many soldiers returned home with severe medical issues and post traumatic stress disorder that ruined the rest of their lives.⁴⁹

This contrast between the fictitious version of a soldier’s return home and the truthful realization of their return home is represented in the album artwork as well. On the cover of the album we see a well dressed Marvin Gaye staring off into the distance, while a light rainfall romantically drips over him, however when we turn the album over we see the true essence of the community Gaye is wishing to stir up with his protest anthems. We see Gaye standing in a children’s playground, alone and surrounded by rusted and broken toys, an image of urban bleakness and the reality of what many soldiers returned home to find.

In the span of just two songs Gaye is able to paint a picture of the modern urban condition in such a way that it became the most accessible form of Black social critique. At this point in his career, Gaye was a leading figure of commercially successful pop and he knew that he had a significant fan base to speak to. Gaye was the male embodiment of Black respectability and his audacity was in speaking to those specific listeners with an urgent political message. Having said that, Gaye, unlike many popular protest musicians,

⁴⁹ Many newspaper articles celebrated soldiers’ return home by documenting things like veterans’ parades, as seen here; Murray Schumach, “2 ‘Veterans’ Parades Here Hail American Soldiers Fighting in Vietnam,” *New York Times*, April 30, 1967, accessed July 6th, 2017, <https://search-proquest-com.ezproxy.library.dal.ca/hnpnewyorktimes/docview/117623262/FF99B73D2F9B4778PQ/2?accountid=10406>. Despite these celebrations it is widely documented that Vietnam veterans struggled with medical issues upon their return. For more information on Post Traumatic Stress Disorder, and other injuries to Vietnam War veterans refer to Wilbur J. Scott *Vietnam Veterans Since The War: The Politics of PTSD, Agent Orange, and the National Memorial* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2004).

does not offer any direct solutions to the problem. Once again this is related to the idea of the politics of respectability, seen previously in the discussion of the Isley Brothers decision to change the lyrics of CSNY's "Ohio." There seems to be two distinct methods in terms of dealing with the politics of respectability, there is Gaye's subtle approach and there is the approach of artists like James Brown. James Brown was another popular black protest artist at the time however he was in complete opposition to respectability. Songs like "Super Bad" gave Brown a negative image in the eye of many consumers, and this was something Gaye wanted to avoid. Rather than outwardly bashing the government and the White community for all of their wrongdoings that led to state of the modern urban condition that Gaye so carefully describes, he attempts to unite his own community through song and show the world that the African-American community is compatible with the mainstream culture.

Sly Stone Answers the Call to Protest

Further solidifying my identification of *What's Going On* as a protest album is the response it elicited after its release. The goal of any protest, in my understanding, is to elicit a response from either the group you are leading or the element you are fighting, so when *Sly and The Family Stone* released their album entitled "There's a Riot Going On" in November of 1971, it was explicitly a response to *What's Going On*, proving that Gaye's call to protest had been taken up. Although well known as a band with a political agenda, Sly and the Family Stone are never directly connected to the genre of protest song. A major part of Sly Stone's agenda was to combine influences, and audiences, clearly exemplified in his use of an integrated band.

Sly and the Family Stone forged a blend of jazz, soul, and San Francisco psychedelic rock, and they created socially engaged music comparable to the style of folk rock. Their innovative sound was a crucial precursor (alongside James Brown) to funk. Their response album *There's a Riot Goin' On* was also a pioneering concept album from a soul band, aligning them with the White-dominated world of album-oriented rock. The challenge these artists made to the White supremacy of rock is acknowledged even in undergraduate textbooks for rock survey classes, such as *Rock: A Canadian Perspective*,

“Album Oriented Rock generally excluded Black artists who were featured on a radio format called ‘urban contemporary’ (the only exceptions to this rule seem to have been Marvin Gaye, Stevie Wonder, and Sly and the Family Stone, whose music transcended the boundary between soul and rock.) While these changes led to greater economic efficiency, the definition of rock as White music, and the increasingly strict split between Black and White popular music formats, reflected the general conservatism of the radio business and the music industry as a whole in the 1970s.”⁵⁰

The shift made by African-American musicians towards album-oriented rock helped solidify their protest messages, and helped to further complicate the protest music genre.

In conclusion, this chapter worked to use Marvin Gaye and his album *What's Going On* to highlight our racialized understandings of protest music and to complicate our standard notions of genre, gender, and race in the 1971 protest movements. Through looking at the history of Motown, an understanding of Marvin Gaye's roots was established, which accented the change in his music when he released *What's Going On*. It also functioned to show that Gaye was embodying protest in every facet of his life at this time, defying all of the regular Motown standards from how he dressed, to how he produced his music. Through a look at Gaye's ideals and musical concepts, an understanding of his protest style was developed. Unlike many protest musicians of the

⁵⁰ Starr, Waterman, and Hodgson, *Rock: A Canadian Perspective*, 228.

time, Gaye had to rely on the politics of respectability to navigate his message, focusing on the issues on the African-American home front during the Vietnam War era. The first two tracks on the album focused on the demise of the urban public life, and juxtaposed the American imperialist agenda in Vietnam with the urban bleakness of the African-American community at home, and created the single most approachable critique of the Black social life. Lastly, this chapter worked to solidify my identification of *What's Going On* as a protest album by examining the direct response that came in the form of a concept album released by Sly and the Family Stone, entitled *There's A Riot Goin' On*. Overall, by breaking away from Motown and returning to an authentically Black sound Marvin Gaye paints a picture of what it meant to be a Black protest musician in 1971 and gives us a reason to redefine protest music.

CHAPTER FOUR

Gil Scott-Heron: “The Revolution Will Not Be Televised”

“I am a Black man dedicated to expression; expression of the joy and pride of Blackness. I consider myself neither poet, composer, nor musician. These are merely tools used by sensitive men to carve out a piece of beauty or truth that they hope may lead to peace and salvation.”

- Gil Scott-Heron¹

By 1971, the television had become a staple of the American home. The technology was constantly advancing, the programming was becoming more sophisticated, and the American business world was taking full advantage of the television’s advertising potential. Similarly, news networks were beginning to increase in popularity, and the idea of live news was becoming increasingly popular. Politicians also saw the television as a viable medium through which to increase their voter capacity, and to push their political ideals. Through all of this, the television became the easiest way to reach the mass consumer market in America, and protestors too could take full advantage of this tool. The Vietnam War was being streamed into people’s living rooms, civil rights protests were being documented, and more than ever people were able to connect with each other over current events happening in America. It is no surprise that the idea of the television as an enemy, or an aid to the Vietnam War protest movements became a focal point for the more radical protest groups. The Black Panthers even went as far as adopting the slogan, “The Revolution Will Not Be Televised” in one of their protest efforts, something that had a great influence on the African-American community

¹ Marcus Baram, *Gil Scott-Heron: Pieces of a Man* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 2014): 74.

as a whole. This motto influenced Gil Scott-Heron to write his poem of the same name in 1969.

This chapter will focus on Gil Scott-Heron and his roots in the Black Arts Movement in America during the late 1960s and early 70s. A brief history of the Black Arts Movement will set up the culture in which Scott-Heron wrote his critical protest work “The Revolution Will Not Be Televised” (TRWNBT). Next, I will focus on the song itself, specifically Scott-Heron’s 1971 version of TRWNBT which was a re-recorded version of the original track that featured a full band. A discussion of Scott-Heron’s distinct style will show how he laid the groundwork for many future styles of African-American music, one of the many ways he helped move a rather stagnant protest movement forward. Lastly, I will discuss some of the messages in Scott-Heron’s lyrics and how they relate directly to the Vietnam War protest effort, linking him with the other more conventional protest musicians of the time. Using Scott-Heron as an example of a protest musician in 1971 will once again highlight the racialized understandings of protest music, and will continue to complicate the standard notions of genre and race with regards to the 1971 protest movements.

Gil Scott-Heron and The Black Arts Movement

Gil Scott-Heron was born April 1st, 1949 in Chicago, and after his parents separated and his mother moved to Puerto Rico to teach English, Scott-Heron lived with his grandmother, who got him started playing the piano.² Scott-Heron was clearly an intelligent child, and in an interview with Alec Wilkinson of *The New Yorker* in 2010

² Marcus Baram, *Gil Scott-Heron: Pieces of a Man*, New York: St. Martin’s Press, 2014: 5-13.

Scott-Heron told the story of how he ended up one of the five Black students attending the Ethical Culture Fieldston School, a private school in a prosperous section of the Bronx. While he was attending his original high school, Scott-Heron was fed up with the selection of books being imposed on him by his English teacher. One day, he told her that he could do a better job of writing than the authors she was teaching and handed her something from his notebook as proof. His teacher read it, and since she had connections to the Fieldston School, she forwarded it to the head of the English department there. Not long after that, the Fieldston School, contacted Scott-Heron, and after passing the interview, he became their newest student.³ It is important to mention this historical fact about Scott-Heron's life because his high level of intellect and his opportunities to attend elite schools are monumental in shaping the protest musician he became.

Fast-forwarding a few years, Scott-Heron attended Lincoln University, a historically Black university in Pennsylvania, and the place where Gil Scott-Heron the protest musician was born. It was at Lincoln University that Scott-Heron met Brian Jackson, his long-time musical partner, and it was where he learned of The Last Poets, an African-American group of poets and musicians dedicated to the civil rights and Black Nationalist movements in America.⁴ In 1969, The Last Poets, led by a man named Abiodun Oyewole, performed at Lincoln University, where at that time Scott-Heron was the student body rep.⁵ The Last Poets performed a new poem entitled "When the Revolution Comes":

When the revolution comes

³ Alec Wilkinson, "New York Is Killing Me: The Unlikely Survival of Gil Scott-Heron," *The New Yorker* August 9th, 2010, accessed May 5th, 2017, <http://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2010/08/09/new-york-is-killing-me>

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Ibid.

When the revolution comes
When the revolution comes some of us will probably catch it on
TV, with chicken hanging from our mouths.
You'll know it's revolution cause there won't be no
commercials
When the revolution comes⁶

Scott-Heron was very intrigued and excited by The Last Poets, and approached Oyewole after their performance and said, "I want to start a group like you guys." To which Oyewole responded, "Go for it. We want to have Last Poets all over the world. It's more than a name, it's a philosophy. Get your shit together right now because we're going to have a revolution. We have to tighten up and get rid of all the negative attitudes."⁷ This was the definitive starting point in Scott-Heron's role as both a literary and musical protestor.

The Last Poets were affiliated with a larger protest movement that existed within the African-American community during the 1960s and early 1970s, known as the Black Arts Movement or BAM. BAM was a literary movement that grew from the larger Black Power movement, which was gaining popularity in the late 60s. According to Kaluma ya Salaam BAM was, "the only American literary movement to advance 'social engagement' as a sine qua non of its aesthetic. The movement broke from the immediate past of protest and petition (civil rights) literature and dashed forward toward an alternative that initially seemed unthinkable and unobtainable: Black Power."⁸

Essentially the Black Arts Movement worked to organize a younger generation of Black intellectuals who used various literary techniques like poetry, combined with other more urban art styles like jazz, to display an authentically Black interpretation of Black culture

⁶ Baram, *Gil Scott-Heron*, 49.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 49.

⁸ Kaluma ya Salaam, "Black Arts Movement," in *The Oxford Companion to African-American Literature* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997): 70.

to the mainstream mass market. This movement was led by the likes of Amiri Baraka (the name chosen by Leroi Jones when he became radicalized) and Larry Neal, two extremely influential members of BAM who worked tirelessly to preserve an authentic Black culture in a time when the African-American culture was being ripped apart.⁹

Gil Scott-Heron and the Mass Media

The Black Arts Movement also played a major role in displaying a positive image of Black culture in the mass media. The mass media plays directly into Scott-Heron's protest anthem "TRWNBT," as one of its main focuses is around the idea of the television, the quintessential tool for mass media. One main focus of the mass media is the idea of the "culture industry," a term coined by Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer in the early 1940s. In their paper, "The Culture Industry: Enlightenment as Mass Deception," Adorno and Horkheimer argue that the idea of the culture industry acts as a method for the mass deception of a society, saying,

"The sociological theory that the loss of the support of objectively established religion, the dissolution of the last remnants of pre-capitalism, together with technological advances and social differentiation or specialization, have led to cultural chaos is disproved every day; for culture now impresses the same stamp on everything."¹⁰

Adorno and Horkheimer made this statement as newcomers to America in the early 1940s, and I suggest that veterans returning from Vietnam might feel the same sort of displacement within the culture that Adorno and Horkheimer felt upon arriving in California from Germany. In his article "The Myth of the Troubled and Scorned

⁹ For an in depth look at some of the foundational concept of the Black arts movement see Leroi Jones, *Blues People: Negro Music in White America* (New York: Harper Collins, 1999).

¹⁰ Theodore Adorno and Max Horkheimer, "The Culture Industry: Enlightenment as Mass Deception," *Dialectic of Enlightenment* (1944): 120.

Vietnam Veteran,” Eric T. Dean Jr. addresses this idea of cultural displacement in Vietnam Veterans, saying,

“Sent home quickly without counseling, the Vietvet was either totally ignored by the civilian population, or worse, spat upon and blamed for losing the unpopular war. [...] As a result, [Vietnam Veterans] suffered from a number of readjustment problems including high unemployment, drug addiction, divorce, suicide, crime, homelessness, ill health due to exposure to Agent Orange, and lingering psychological problems (post traumatic stress disorder).”¹¹

This experience of cultural displacement felt by Vietnam War veterans also relates directly to the experience of Africans moving to America, or African-Americans moving from the rural south to the urbanized north.

Adorno and Horkheimer wrote their essay in response to Walter Benjamin’s “The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction.” Benjamin argues that by losing authenticity, through the mechanization of art production, or in other words the ability to reproduce art on a grand scale, the audience is able to criticize and assess the work, generating more audience participation. He says, “The audience’s identification with the actor is really an identification with the camera. Consequently the audience takes the position of the camera; its approach is that of testing.”¹² Both of these arguments boil down to the idea that Benjamin, Horkheimer, and Adorno are working to teach readers to read media critically and be wary of its hidden agenda.

What does this mean for Gil Scott-Heron and the African-American protest movements of the early 1970s? As a more in-depth study of Scott-Heron’s music and lyrics will show, TRWNBT works to actively expose the role the mass-media takes in endorsing mainstream leadership within the Black community without the approval of the

¹¹ Eric T. Dean Jr., “The Myth of the Troubled and Scorned Vietnam Veteran,” *Journal of American Studies* 26:1 (April 1992): 59-60.

¹² Walter Benjamin, “The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction” (UCLA School of Theatre, Film and Television, 1936): 228.

African-American community as a whole. In fact Scott-Heron's lyrics show that the mass media has a negative effect on the democratic and shared relationships within the African-American community. Thus Scott-Heron is complementing Adorno and Horkheimer's way of thinking, suggesting that the mainstream media's portrayal of Black Power movements, as militaristic and dangerous, paints a monolithic image of the African-American community. This deceives the mass-culture into thinking the Black protest movements have a negative impact on society. At the same time he is urging African-Americans to not be passive, content with the mass-culture's characterization of the African-American experience and social struggles. In addition to this, Scott-Heron also walks a thin line of displaying Benjamin's arguments. His music and his efforts to push the envelope in a way that bridges the gap between Black literacy and African-American musical traditions, creates an opportunity for the African-American community to get more involved in the protests and the display of these movements on television allows for them to expand across the country and to organize under one unified idea.

The Revolution Will Not Be Televised

In 1971, Scott-Heron was deeply involved with literature, in tune with political issues surrounding his culture, and someone very well versed in the Black popular music of the time. In Scott-Heron's 1990 book *So Far, So Good*, his first publication since the release of his first two books *The Vulture* (1970) and *The Nigger Factory* (1972), poet Haki Madhubuti describes his literary process,¹³

“A young, young griot on the rise. His message was Black, political, historically accurate, urgent, uncompromising, and mature [...] Gil Scott-Heron was

¹³ Gil Scott-Heron, *The Vulture* (Edinburgh: Cannongate Books, 2010): i; and Gil Scott-Heron, *The Nigger Factory* (Edinburgh: Cannongate Books, 2010): i.

definitely in the tradition of Amiri Baraka, Sonia Sanchez, Larry Neal and others who brought in the powerful decade of the sixties. He had listened to and digested the works of Malcolm X, Nina Simone, Jimmy Reed, and John Coltrane. In him we saw the poetic storytelling skills of Sterling Brown and the precise word usage of Margaret Alexander Walker and Gwendolyn Brooks.”¹⁴

Mark Anthony Neal makes a similar strong statement about Scott-Heron’s musical contributions, saying, “Aside from the recorded work of Nikki Giovanni, who conflated her poetry with gospel music on two recordings in the early 1970s, no artist better represented the progressive Black political tradition in music than Gil Scott-Heron.”¹⁵

In the 1971 recorded version of TRWNBT Scott-Heron delivers his poetry over a backbeat that consists of a complex drum beat, played by Bernard “pretty” Purdie, a repeating bass line that acts to focus the tonic and the dominant within the song, played by Ron Carter, and a highly ornamented and highly improvised flute solo, played by Hubert Laws. All the members of Scott-Heron’s band for his album *Pieces of Man* were African-American, and they all returned to play on his next album *Free Will*, released in 1972. You can easily draw a connection between the ornamented flute improvisations and the saxophone improvisations prevalent in the work of John Coltrane, and there is a clear connection to jazz, with the complex drum pattern, and the walking bassline that not only roots the key of the song but helps to sustain the rhythm of the song. The rhythm becomes vitally important in this song because Scott-Heron uses the rhythm of the bass and the drums to move his poetry forward. What Scott-Heron lacks in melodic variance with his voice he makes up for with his accented and punctuated rhythmic speech.

¹⁴ Haki R. Madhubuti, “INTRODUCTION Conscientious Wanderer: Gil Scott-Heron,” in *So Far, So Good*, by Gil Scott Heron (Chicago: Third World Press, 1990): i.

¹⁵ Mark Anthony Neal, *What the Music Said: Black popular Music and Black Public Culture*, New York: Routledge, 1999: 107.

There is an indisputable connection between the way Gil Scott-Heron delivers his poetry and the way hip-hop artists of today deliver rap. The single most defining characteristic of Gil Scott-Heron as a protest musician is that he is often identified as a forefather for the genre of Rap. Rap has become a staple of African-American music culture and over the years it has come to define African-American culture and aesthetic. Dj Kool Herc says, "Hip-hop is the voice of this generation. Even if you didn't grow up in the Bronx in the '70s, hip-hop is there for you. It has become a powerful force. Hip-hop binds all of these people, all of these nationalities, all over the world together."¹⁶ Jeff Chang reiterates this, when he says, "My own feeling is that the idea of the Hip-Hop Generation brings together time and race, place and polyculturalism, hot beats and hybridity. It describes the turn of politics to culture, the process of entropy and reconstruction. It captures the collective hopes and nightmares, ambitions and failures of those who would otherwise be described as 'post-this' or 'post that'"¹⁷ Rap worked to galvanize a generation of African-Americans after the time of Scott-Heron in the early 70s, and most importantly it has supported various forms of protest since its conception. Scott-Heron was able to successfully merge the literary protest movements of the 60s, with authentically Black music, to create a venue for protest by the African-American people, for African-American culture.

In her book *Black Noise: Rap Music and Black Culture in Contemporary America*, Tricia Rose argues that,

"Rap music brings together a tangle of some of the most complex social, cultural and political issues in contemporary American society. Rap's contradictory articulations are not signs of absent intellectual clarity; they are a common

¹⁶ Jeff Chang, *Can't Stop, Won't Stop: A History of the Hip-Hop Generation* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2005): xii.

¹⁷ Chang, *Can't Stop, Won't Stop*, 2.

feature of community and popular cultural dialogues that always offer more than one cultural, social or political view”¹⁸

This relates very closely to Scott-Heron and his work on TRWNBT. Scott-Heron’s song does indeed bring together some of the most complex political issues in American society. For example, Scott-Heron uses some very strong lyrics lashing out against the domination of White culture over African-American culture, “The revolution will be right back after a message about a White tornado, White lightning, or White people.”¹⁹ Clearly Scott-Heron is alluding to the fact that any issues dealing with White culture take precedence over any issues with Black Culture. Scott-Heron also makes outright statements about his feelings on the government and mass consumer corporations, with lyrics like, “The revolution will not show you pictures of Nixon blowing a bugle and leading a charge by John Mitchell, General Abrams and Spiro Agnew to eat hog maws confiscated from Harlem sanctuary” and, “The revolution will not give your mouth sex appeal [referring to Ultra Brite toothpaste advertising]. The revolution will not get rid of the nubs [referring to a commercial for the Gillette Techmatic Razor]. The revolution will not make you look five pounds thinner, the revolution will not be televised, Brother.”²⁰ In addition to these obvious political, cultural, and social critiques inherent in Scott-Heron’s lyrics, I have to agree with Rose in saying that Scott-Heron is offering more than one cultural, social or political view. Many writers are doing this at the same time as Scott-Heron, but what makes him successful is his musicality. His skill at spoken word, his distinct rhythm, his phrasing that can complement or contrast the

¹⁸ Tricia Rose, *Black Noise: Black Culture in Contemporary America* (Hanover: Wesleyan University Press, 1994): 2.

¹⁹ Gil Scott-Heron, *The Revolution Will Not Be Televised* (New York: RCA Studios, 1971).

²⁰ Gil Scott-Heron, *The Revolution Will Not Be Televised* (New York: RCA Studios, 1971).

groove, and the timbre of his voice all set him apart from other poets and writers of the time.

The Revolution Will Not Be Televised and The Vietnam War

Although the title of the song and the most repeated lyric throughout the song, “The Revolution Will Not Be Televised,” has a direct tie to the Black civil rights protest movements, in that it is a popular slogan of the 1960s Black Power movements, I feel as though Scott-Heron chose this slogan carefully to represent a protest to the armed conflict happening in Vietnam. Other than the obvious point that Black protests are often ignored by the White mass culture, and therefore not shown on television, Scott-Heron uses the idea of the television in a unique way to represent a protest external to Black culture. Scott-Heron is clearly referring to the television as a method of connecting with the mass culture in America, and his lyrics are full of examples of this. He mentions actors and actresses such as Natalie Wood and Steve McQueen, he mentions television shows such as *Julia* (starring Diahann Carroll), *Green Acres*, *The Beverley Hillbillies*, and *Search For Tomorrow*, and he mentions countless products displayed on television advertisements such as Dove deodorant, Esso fuel, Liquid-Plumr, Coca-Cola, Listerine, and Hertz rental cars.²¹ Scott-Heron’s connection to the television is important when understanding his connection to the Vietnam War protest movement in 1971 because the television played a vital role in the Vietnam War experience both in Vietnam and on the home front, a point that seems to go unrecognized in any discussion of Scott Heron’s protest anthem. The reason for this could be that in the early 70s literary

²¹ Gil Scott-Heron, *The Revolution Will Not Be Televised* (New York: RCA Studios, 1971); for a full list of the references found in Scott Heron’s lyrics I have attached a chart as Appendix B.

critics may have thought the tv was beneath contempt, while they recognized Scott-Heron as an important voice.

The Vietnam War was the first time in American history that the carnage of War was broadcast live into family's living rooms. In his book *War and Television* Bruce Cummings says, "Vietnam was thought to be the first 'television war,' a quality to which some – especially the Pentagon – attributed the American defeat: won on the battlefield, lost in the living room."²² Another study on the effect of television on the Vietnam War says, "Antiwar rallies often became a form of theatre, with crowds, impassioned speakers, and occasionally open conflict between demonstrators and police. The antiwar movement was the equivalent, on the home front, of combat footage in Vietnam itself."²³

This idea that the war was won on the battlefield but lost in the living room resonates with Scott-Heron's protest anthem in many ways. The first being that the many rallies protesting the Vietnam War across America were seen as detrimental to the war effort and were therefore only displayed on television in a negative light. This creates a negative view of the war effort as a whole in the country, which worked against the government, leading to them losing the war at home. Richard Nixon himself said,

"The Vietnam War was complicated by factors that had never before occurred in America's conduct of a war [...] [T]he American news media had to come to dominate domestic opinion about its purpose and conduct. [...] In each night's TV news and each morning's paper the war was reported battle by battle, but little or no sense of the underlying purpose of the fighting was conveyed. Eventually this contributed to the impression that we were fighting in military and moral quicksand, rather than toward an important and worthwhile objective. More than ever before, television showed the terrible human suffering and sacrifice of war. Whatever the intention behind such a relentless and literal reporting of the war, the result was a serious demoralization of the home front,

²² Bruce Cummings, *War and Television* (New York: Verso, 1992): 1.

²³ Michael Mandelbaum, "Vietnam: The Television War," *Print Culture and Video Culture* (Fall, 1982): 164.

raising the question whether America would ever again be able to fight an enemy abroad with unity and strength of purpose at home.”²⁴

The dissolution on the home front that Nixon refers to is clearly represented by Scott-Heron in his lyrics, and his choice to use the television as a representation of the mass-media works to represent the struggle protestors had on the home front. If the revolution is not televised, how can the country organize in opposition of the atrocities they are viewing in their living rooms each night?

In addition, using a Black Power statement as a representation of the Vietnam War protest movement gives Scott-Heron’s message an added level of depth. Looking at Richard Nixon’s statement we can see a clear connection between the Vietnam War and the war African-Americans were waging in America for equality. The fight for equality was complicated by the news media’s domination of the domestic opinion of the African-American culture within America. Each night the TV news would report on African-American protests, or for the sake of this argument, battles, with little or no sense of the underlying purpose of the fighting. This led to mass audiences in America developing the impression that the African-American culture was fighting a battle in a moral grey area with no progression toward a worthwhile objective. In other words, it paints a picture of Black Americans protesting without a cause. This led to a serious demoralization on the home front, which in this case is the African-American diaspora, causing Black Americans across the country to question whether or not they will be able to continue to fight for their rights.

²⁴ Richard Nixon, *RN: The Memoirs of Richard Nixon* (New York: Grosset and Dunlap, 1978): 350.

This level of depth to Scott-Heron's protest song is unprecedented in the protest music seen coming from the White, folk rock protest musicians of the time, and truly works to complicate the entire understanding of what a protest song can be. The point that really hammers this home is the last line of Scott-Heron's song, "The revolution will be live."²⁵ By ending the song this way Scott-Heron is offering a solution to the issue of the mass media portrayal of the African-American community, and to the broader issue of the Vietnam War. By telling the listener the revolution will be live he is asking the audience to put the television aside, and take to the streets in an act of live protest, because the protest will only be successful through organization and hard work live in the streets.

The Future of Protest With Gil Scott-Heron

Gil Scott-Heron authentically displays a protest song with forward motion in TRWNBT. Through combining the literary power of BAM with authentically Black music, Scott-Heron laid the groundwork for the genre known today as Rap. In addition to that Scott-Heron helped pull the antiquated protest methods, found in the civil rights protests of the time, toward a more informed and effective protest style, by incorporating the importance of the anti-Vietnam War sentiment sweeping across America. Lastly, Scott-Heron represented progressive Black political thought, using music, offering protest solutions to many members of the African-American community during a time when the protest movement was becoming more and more fractured.

²⁵ Gil Scott-Heron, *The Revolution Will Not Be Televised* (New York: RCA Studios, 1971).

In order to express Scott-Heron's true dedication to the protest movement I want to briefly look at a tribute he did to Marvin Gaye's "What's Going On" album 10 years later in 1981 when he covered the song "Inner City Blues (Make Me Wanna Holler)" on his album entitled "Reflections". Although not discussed in the previous chapter, Marvin Gaye's song "Inner City Blues" was a prominent protest song on his 1971 album "What's Going On." According to Mark Anthony Neal,

"Inner City Blues' gives presence to the silent masses of Black working class and working poor who were displaced and dislocated from community, culture, and social stability – groups historically marginalized from organized and institutionally based struggles for justice and whose only other recourse for resistance, after the death of King, often took the form of improvised and misdirected rage and symbolic nationalist posturing."²⁶

If we think about Neal's analysis of Marvin Gaye's "Inner City Blues" in the context of Scott-Heron's TRWNBT a definite line can be drawn connecting the protest message of the two songs. Scott-Heron, much like Marvin Gaye, worked to give a voice for those historically marginalized groups of African-Americans, and he offered a solution for them in the form of a protest song that was not misdirected rage or nationalistic posturing. It makes sense that Scott-Heron would choose to cover this song, and his doing so only acts to further solidify both Marvin Gaye and himself as protest musicians for the African-American people.

Overall, this chapter worked to display Gil Scott-Heron as a protest hero and his song "The Revolution Will Not Be Televised" as a protest anthem in the 1971 protest movements. By linking Gil Scott-Heron to the Black Arts movement an understanding of Scott-Heron's literary influences was developed. This developed the context in which Scott-Heron was able to write his protest anthem. By looking at the song itself,

²⁶ Neal, *What The Music Said*, 65.

specifically the 1971 recorded version, a discussion of Scott-Heron's style grounded his work as authentically African-American, and showed how he laid the groundwork for many future styles of African-American protest music in the form of rap. This helped to support my argument for the need to redefine the genre of protest music, and move away from the narrow-minded thinking of assuming protest music is nothing more than folk rock. Finally this chapter looked at the messages in Scott-Heron's lyrics and showed how his sophisticated writing led to a complex and intricate protest message that not only acted as a protest against the Vietnam War, but also acted as a metaphor for the African-American protest movements in America. All of this shows how Scott-Heron worked to move the rather stagnant African-American protest movements forward into the Anti-Vietnam War generation. The Revolution may not be televised but Scott-Heron made sure it was recorded and heard across the world by creating a clear and successful protest anthem accessible to the mass culture in America.

CHAPTER FIVE

Conclusion

“Struggle is a never ending process. Freedom is never really won, you earn it and win it in every generation.”

- Coretta Scott King¹

“It is time for parents to teach young people early on that in diversity there is beauty and there is strength. We all should know that diversity makes for a rich tapestry, and we must understand that all the threads of that tapestry are equal in value no matter their colour; equal in importance no matter their texture.”

- Maya Angelou²

Possibly the biggest question to ask when trying to rethink the racialized understanding of protest music in 1971 is: what does this mean for us today? While it is important to study Marvin Gaye, Gil Scott-Heron, and the Isley Brothers, what good does it do for the present, to look at their music as protest anthems? The answer to these questions lies first in creating a new definition of protest music, and second in looking at the current political climate in America, and the popular music being performed by African-American musicians.

In order to create a new definition of protest music the notion of what musical styles are considered protest music must be addressed. I feel that protest music should be all encompassing in terms of musical styles. Rather than focusing on the style of music, protest music should be focused on the message and the actual act of protesting something. With this in mind the new definition of protest music should be a song of any musical style that is being used to further an important message for the gain of a protest

¹ Coretta Scott King, *My Life with Martin Luther King Jr.* (London: Macmillan Publishers, 1993): xii.

² Maya Angelou, *Rainbow in the Cloud: The Wisdom and Spirit of Maya Angelou* (New York: Random House LLC, 2014): 6.

movement. Using this new definition we can now look at the current situation in American and determine what protest music looks like today.

The current political climate in America is, to put it simply, divided. When Donald Trump was elected the 45th President of the United States of America, there were two distinct camps: those who supported Trump, and those who absolutely did not, with no real middle ground. During his run for president Trump's populist positions in opposition to illegal immigration and various trade agreements, earned him support, especially among voters who were male, white, blue-collar, and those without college degrees.³ In addition Trump had a specific agenda of disdain from political correctness, something that proved popular amongst his supporters, despite many people seeing Trump as appealing to racism.⁴ Most of Trump's racism surrounded his proposals about immigration, border security, and the deportation of all illegal immigrants. He proposed building a wall on the Mexico-United States Border at Mexican expense, he implemented a temporary ban on foreign Muslims entering the United States, and he characterized Mexicans as "criminals, drug dealers, and rapists."⁵ After Trump's election there were protests across the country, and whether or not you choose to support Trump it is hard to deny the fact that his presidential campaign and subsequent election created a politically charged and fractured climate in the United States of America.

³ Phillip Bump, "Why Donald Trump's big advantage among those without college degrees is important," *The Washington Post*, December 4th, 2015, accessed April 4th 2017, https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/the-fix/wp/2015/12/04/why-trumps-big-advantage-among-those-without-college-degrees-is-important/?utm_term=.491852ae971c.

⁴ Paul Waldman, "Donald Trump is running the most explicitly racist campaign since 1968," *The Week*, November 25th, 2015, accessed April 14th 2017, <http://theweek.com/articles/590711/donald-trump-running-most-explicitly-racist-campaign-since-1968>.

⁵ Chad Merda, "Donald Trump's 900 words on Mexico's drugs, disease and rapists," *Sun Times National*, July 7th 2015, accessed April 16th 2017, <http://national.suntimes.com/national-world-news/7/72/1424286/donald-trump-mexico-drugs-disease-rapists/>.

While all of this was happening there was also a lot of media attention surrounding events in the United States related to police conduct. In 2012, a white member of his neighborhood watch, George Zimmerman, shot and killed Trayvon Martin, a black teenager. Zimmerman was later acquitted of his crimes causing national outrage. This was not an isolated incident. After the media covered the Trayvon Martin case, other instances similar to this one, such as the deaths of Tamir Rice, Mike Brown, Eric Garner, Sandra Bland, Rekia Boyd, Philandro Castile, and the violence at the McKinney pool party, began popping up across the United States. This led to the creation of the Black Lives Matter movement, a movement working for the validity of black life: “Rooted in the experiences of Black people in this country who actively resist our dehumanization, #BlackLivesMatter is a call to action and a response to the virulent anti-Black racism that permeates our society.”⁶ The political climate in the United States, coupled with movements like the Black Lives Matter movement paint a picture of the United States as a country that is very similar to the United States of 1971, and much like in 1971 African-American musicians present in the popular music scene are still classified by their musical characteristics first and by their message second.

A perfect example is Beyoncé, an extremely popular African-American pop singer who over the past decade has evolved from brief mentions of iconic civil rights names in her music, to powerful, unapologetically black performances in front of international audiences. During the halftime show at Super Bowl 50, Beyoncé performed the first ever, live version of her new song “Formation.” The performance was controversial as it was a clear nod towards the 50th anniversary of the Black Panther party

⁶ Black Lives Matter, “About the Black Lives Matter Network,” accessed May 7th 2017, <http://blacklivesmatter.com/about/>

and the NFL strictly prohibits political statements in its performances.⁷ Beyoncé and her back up dancers appeared dressed as Black Panthers for this performance, wearing Black Panther style berets and black leather. Beyoncé’s performance aligned her with the Black Lives Matter movement, and showed the world that pop music could be protest music. Beyoncé’s ties to the Black Lives Matter movement become even more clear after the release of the music video for “Formation,” with one scene in particular showing a young African-American boy in a hoodie dancing in front of a line of police officers wearing riot gear, followed by the words “Stop Shooting Us” painted in graffiti on a wall. There are a number of references found in that one short scene. The young boy in the hoodie is certainly a nod to the deaths of Trayvon Martin and Tamir Rice, the police in riot gear clearly represents the way African-Americans have been treated by police throughout the years, and the words “Stop Shooting Us,” are clearly linked to race issues present in the United States. The fact that these words appear in “graffiti” print on a wall also signifies the graffiti art form that emerged in America alongside hip-hop and breakdancing, other forms of distinctly black art. The song “Formation” would end up being on Beyoncé’s album, *Lemonade*, which received tremendous success after its release. *Lemonade* was released along with an hour-long film, making it a visual album, which aired on HBO. *Lemonade* is widely considered Beyoncé’s most critically acclaimed work to date, being listed as the best album of 2016 by Rolling Stone.⁸

⁷ Jessica Elgot, “Beyoncé unleashes Black Panthers homage at Super Bowl 50,” *The Guardian*, February 8th, 2016, accessed June 1st 2017, <https://www.theguardian.com/music/2016/feb/08/beyonce-black-panthers-homage-black-lives-matter-super-bowl-50>.

⁸ Rolling Stone, “50 Bestalbums of 2016,” Last modified in 2016, <http://www.rollingstone.com/music/lists/50-best-albums-of-2016-w451265/david-bowie-blackstar-w451267>.

The single most important reason why *Lemonade* points directly at our need to rethink our racialized understandings of protest music comes from the reception of the album at the 59th Grammy Awards. *Lemonade* was nominated for nine Grammy awards including Album of the Year, the most prestigious award at the Grammy's, and song of the year for "Formation." When all was said and done *Lemonade* took home just two awards, one for best music video for "Formation," and the other, best urban contemporary album.⁹ I have a problem with the fact that an album, obviously worthy of the recognition, was given an award with the asterisk of "urban contemporary," instead of the full appreciation it deserved. This points directly to the issue dealt with in terms of African-American protest musicians in 1971. The African-American musicians are classified by their musical style, whether that is funk, pop, soul, or in this case urban contemporary, and it is impossible for them to break from that mold and have their messages taken seriously. They are continuously stuck in the shadows of white musicians. This point was driven home at the 59th Grammy Awards by Adele, who won the award for album of the year, when she said, "I can't possibly accept this award. I'm very grateful and very gracious, but my artist of my life is Beyoncé, and this album for me... the *Lemonade* album was so monumental, well thought out and so beautiful and soul-baring."¹⁰ Adele was reaching out to Beyoncé and recognizing her contribution to the music world, despite her failure to win the award.

⁹ Christopher Morris, "2017 Grammy Awards: Adele, Beyoncé Lead Nominations," *Variety*, December 6th 2016, accessed June 4th 2017, <http://variety.com/2016/music/awards/lemonade-album-of-the-year-grammys-beyonce-25-blackstar-1201934214/>.

¹⁰ Nick Bond, "Adele refuses biggest Grammy win: 'I can't possibly accept this award,'" *New Zealand Herald*, February 13th 2017, accessed June 6th 2017, http://www.nzherald.co.nz/entertainment/news/article.cfm?c_id=1501119&objectid=11799918.

1971 was a tumultuous time in the United States of America, and much like today it was full of African-American musicians working hard to validate their culture, community, and heritage. African-Americans are omitted from the discussion of the protest song genre throughout the years and this is the reason it is essential to rethink our racialized understandings of protest music and to complicate standard notions of genre, gender, generation, and race in the year 1971.

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APPENDIX A

Textbook	Protest Musicians listed	Isley Brothers	Marvin Gaye	Sly and the Family Stone	Gil Scott-Heron
Rock: Music, Culture, and Business by Schloss, Star, and Waterman	<p>“Many college students felt it would be inconsistent to spend the day discussing sophisticated political and philosophical ideas, but then come home to listen to “the Twist”¹²⁴⁻¹²⁵</p> <p>Bob Dylan, Joan Baez, Kingston Trio, Pete Seeger, the weavers,</p>	<p>Mentions their recording of the twist. Recording of love the one you’re with in 1971.</p>	<p>Vocal group, “What’s Going On” fused soul music and gospel influence with the political impetus of progressive rock. “Theme Album”</p>	<p>The birth of rock multiculturalism, Blend of jazz, soul, San Francisco psychedelic, and socially engaged lyrics of folk rock. A major part of stones agenda was to combine influences, and audiences. Mentions specific Dylan influence.</p>	<p>Mentioned briefly in a discussion of the birth of Hip-Hop</p>
Rockin’ Out: Popular Music in the USA by Reebee Garofalo and Steve Waksman	<p>John Lennon, Bob Dylan, CSNY.</p>	<p>Soft Soul sound – “That Lady”</p>	<p>Motown sound and Barry Gordy. Lumped in with Stevie Wonder as Motown’s first independent album artists.</p>	<p>San Francisco rock scene, The only act that could be considered a Black act with a substantial African-American following. Married funk and rock cultures.</p>	<p>Included in the discussion of the birth of hip-hop with Dj Kool Herc</p>
Rockin’ in Time: A Social History of Rock and Roll by David P. Szatmary and Lynsay Ripley	<p>Wobblies, Joe Hill, Woody Guthrie, Pete Seeger, the Weavers, Kingston Trio, Bob Dylan, Joan Baez.</p>	<p>Twist and shout</p> <p>Hendrix performed with the Isley Brothers in 1964.</p>	<p>A Romantic balladeer.</p>	<p>Woodstock – “One family...we were all part of one another” combination of rock, funk and psychedelic to top the charts. “Sly first cracked the barrier between Black-and-White rock.” George Clinton</p>	<p>Used as an example when discussing the song “The Message” by Grandmaster Flash and the Furious Five</p>
Rock: A Canadian Perspective by Larry Starr, Christopher Waterman, and Jay Hodgson	<p>Bob Dylan, Joan Baez, Woody Guthrie, Pete Seeger, Neil Young</p>	<p>The Beatles learned twist and shout from the Isley Brothers</p>	<p>Motown, Top 40s, Able to connect long-standing aspects of blues-based musical traditions with elements from rock. Social Justice theme album -</p>	<p>Album Oriented rock, Sly, Stevie Wonder, and Marvin Gaye are the only Black groups to crack the AOR field. Bridged the gap between rock and soul</p>	<p>Not mentioned</p>

Textbook	Protest Musicians listed	Isley Brothers	Marvin Gaye	Sly and the Family Stone	Gil Scott-Heron
American Popular Music by David Lee Joyner	Dixie Chicks, Bob Dylan, Woody Guthrie, Pete Seeger, Kingston Trio, the Weavers, Reggae.	Not mentioned	Associated directly with Motown and the Motown sound.	Founders of funk with James Brown, intricate grooves driven by Larry Graham on bass guitar, utopian message of universal love.	Not mentioned
Think Rock by Kevin J.H. Dettmar	Protest song is a type of folk song that uses music to deliver a topical message. Mentions Woody Guthrie, Pete Seeger, and Bob Dylan	Not mentioned	Not mentioned	Not mentioned	Not mentioned
Rock and Roll by Joe Stuessy and Scott Lipscomb	Kingston trio, Joan Baez, CSNY	Isley brothers left Motown because of Berry Gordy	Talented songwriter for “What’s Going On” discussing issues pop wasn’t discussing at the time. Tension between secular and sacred life. Block gospel sound transferred to the pop world.	First stylistic directions evolved in San Francisco – Sly Stone combining soul and psychedelic.	His name is used to describe a type of drumbeat in a discussion of the birth of hip-hop
Rock Music Styles: A History by Katherine Charlton	Bob Dylan, CSNY	Mentioned only in combination with Chubby Checker and the twist	Influenced by the jazz and soul styles of Ray Charles, also gospel influence	Copied James Brown’s sound, gospel influence, mentions interracial and political activists	Not mentioned
North American Popular Music by Glenn Appell, David Hemphill, and Matt Vanderwoude	No specific mention of protest music	Popular R&B soul figures with roots in Gospel Quartets	One of soul music’s most charismatic figures, spanned history of R&B from doo-wop (1950s) to 80s dance music, embodied Motown sound.	Soul-rock synthesis that formed the basis of Funk. Mentions some of their political activism.	Discussed as a part of the birth of Hip-Hop.

APPENDIX B

You will not be able to stay home, brother
You will not be able to plug in, turn on and drop out
You will not be able to lose yourself on skag and skip
Skip out for beer during commercials
Because the revolution will not be televised

The revolution will not be televised

The revolution will not be brought to you by Xerox
In 4 parts without commercial interruption
The revolution will not show you pictures of Nixon
Blowing a bugle and leading a charge by John Mitchell
General Abrams and Spiro Agnew to eat
Hog maws confiscated from a Harlem sanctuary

The revolution will not be televised

The revolution will be brought to you by the Schaefer Award Theatre and
will not star Natalie Wood and Steve McQueen or Bullwinkle and Julia
The revolution will not give your mouth sex appeal
The revolution will not get rid of the nubs
The revolution will not make you look five pounds
Thinner, because The revolution will not be televised, Brother

There will be no pictures of you and Willie Mays
Pushing that cart down the block on the dead run
Or trying to slide that color television into a stolen ambulance
NBC will not predict the winner at 8:32 or the count from 29 districts

The revolution will not be televised

There will be no pictures of pigs shooting down
Brothers in the instant replay
There will be no pictures of young being
Run out of Harlem on a rail with a brand new process
There will be no slow motion or still life of
Roy Wilkins strolling through Watts in a red, Black and
Green liberation jumpsuit that he had been saving
For just the right occasion

Green Acres, The Beverly Hillbillies, and
 Hooterville Junction will no longer be so damned relevant
 and Women will not care if Dick finally gets down with
 Jane on Search for Tomorrow because Black people
 will be in the street looking for a brighter day

The revolution will not be televised

There will be no highlights on the eleven o'clock News
 and no pictures of hairy armed women Liberationists and
 Jackie Onassis blowing her nose
 The theme song will not be written by Jim Webb, Francis Scott Key
 nor sung by Glen Campbell, Tom Jones, Johnny Cash
 Englebert Humperdink, or the Rare Earth

The revolution will not be televised

The revolution will not be right back after a message
 About a Whitetornado, White lightning, or White people
 You will not have to worry about a germ on your Bedroom
 a tiger in your tank, or the giant in your toilet bowl
 The revolution will not go better with Coke
 The revolution will not fight the germs that cause bad breath
 The revolution WILL put you in the driver's seat
 The revolution will not be televised

WILL not be televised, WILL NOT BE TELEVISED

The revolution will be no re-run brothers
 The revolution will be live

Lyric	Reference
Plug in, turn on, and cop out	Timothy Leary's pro-LSD phrase "Turn on, tune in, drop out."
Lose yourself on Skag	Slang for Heroin
Brought to you by Xerox	Photocopier manufacturing company
Pictures of Nixon	The 37 th president of the United States, Richard Nixon
Leading a charge by John Mitchell	Richard Nixon's U.S. Attorney General, John Mitchell

Lyric	Reference
General Abrams	General Creighton Abrams, commander of military operations in Vietnam from 1968-1972
Spiro Agnew	Richard Nixon's Vice President
Eat Hog Maws	Hog Maws is a type of soul food typically consumed on New Years Day in the Southern United States
Brought to you by the Schaefer Award Theatre	A television program that aired full length movies and was sponsored by Schaefer Beer
Natalie Wood	Actress
Steve McQueen	Actor
Bullwinkle	Rock and Bullwinkle cartoon character
Julia	American sitcom starring Diahann Carroll, one of the first sitcoms to feature an African-American woman in a non-conventional role
The revolution will not give your mouth sex appeal	Ultra Brite toothpaste advertisement
The revolution will not get rid of the nubs	Gillette Techmatic razor advertisement
The revolution will not make you look 5 pounds lighter	Reference to popular diet fads of the time
No pictures of you and Willie Mays	Professional Baseball player
Trying to slide that colour television into a stolen ambulance	Reference to the happenings during the Watts Riots and other racial unrest riots of the 60s and 70s
NBC will not predict the winner at 8:32 or the count from 29 districts	Terminology used in television networks during the presidential elections in America
No pictures of pigs shooting down brothers	Pigs is a common reference to the police and brothers was common slang for African-American people
In instant replay	A brand new feature in sports broadcasating
Whitney Young	A civil rights leader
Roy Wilkens	Leader of the NAACP
Watts	A reference to the Watts Riots of 1965
Red, Black, and green liberation jumpsuit	The colours of the Pan-African flag
Green Acres, The Beverly Hillbillies, and Hooterville Junction	American T.V. sitcoms
Women will not care if Dick finally gets down with Jane	Dick and Jane are a Caucasian brother and sister duo usually found in books teaching children to read

Lyric	Reference
Search for Tomorrow	American soap opera on T.V. from 1951-1986
Hairy-armed women liberationists	A common expression about members of the feminist movement at the time
Jackie Onassis	President John F. Kennedy's widow
There will not be a song written by Jim Webb	An American composer
Francis Scott Key	The man who wrote the lyrics for the American National Anthem
Nor sung by Glen Campbell	American country music singer
Tom Jones	Pop music singer
Johnny Cash	Country music singer
Englebert Humperdink	Pop music singer
Rare Earth	An all White pop music group signed to the African-American label Motown
White tornado	Ajax cleaning advertisement
White lightning	The original name for the soda known today as Mountain Dew
Dove in your bedroom	Dove brand deodorant commercial
Tiger in your tank	Esso or Exxon Mobile fuel advertisement
Giant in your toilet bowl	Ty-D-Bol toilet cleaner advertisement
Will not go better with coke	Coke is the popular name for the soda Coca-Cola
Will not fight germs that cause bad breath	Listerine mouthwash advertisement
Will put you in the drivers seat	Hertz rental car advertisement