

RAP: THE CALL FOR JUSTICE

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Preface

A Short Outline

Rap is a genre of popular music which came into existence in New York City in the beginning of the seventies. Rap can be defined as the urban, originally black musical form, in which a text that is accompanied by a bass or drum beat is recited rhythmically. The most striking feature of rap music is that the text is spoken rather than sung.

For about ten years, rap developed in New York. During this period, it was the musical form of black youths in the ghettos. Around rap, a subculture of young blacks came into existence, which is referred to as hip hop. Besides rap, hip hop included graffiti, dance forms and clothing styles. Graffiti and the hip hop dance forms gradually lost their popularity. Rap however, never lost a substantial part of its appeal. Rap even took the collective term of the subculture. That is, rap has become synonymous for hip hop.

In the eighties, rap was discovered by the commercial music industry. As a result, the term rap became more widely known, not only in the United States, where hip hop culture flourished in the ghettos of many inner cities, but all over the world. On the one hand, this meant that rap was no longer exclusively the musical form of black youths, though they still consider rap to be their music. On the other hand, the fact that rap had become more widely known enabled rappers (of whom the larger part is black) to deal with serious issues in their rap lyrics. In the so-called message raps, many rappers pay attention to the problems which black Americans (and especially those in the ghettos of the inner cities) have to face. It is obvious that rap can be a very powerful weapon for

socially and politically engaged rappers to activate the racial consciousness of black Americans and to make the world acquainted with the deplorable circumstances many blacks are in.

My interest in rap music was roused by reading Go Gerdy, a book

written by cultural anthropologist Gerdy van der Stap. In Go Gerdy, she gives an account of her contacts with black teenagers in Harlem, New York City. The book offered me a totally new dimension of rap music. Particularly the words of a black male teenager who was interviewed by Gerdy van der Stap made a deep impression on me:

Word, if it wasn't for rap we all be runnin' wild on the street. Doin' crack, carryin' a piece, and kill for some green.

(van der Stap 1990: 107)

I used to associate rap music with a monotonous beat and a very swift, but hardly intelligible, torrent of words. Yet, Go Gerdy gave me the idea that rap has many things to say about the lives of black Americans and especially those who live in the inner cities. In order to go deeper into the world of rap and to show others that rap is not without substance, I have decided to write a thesis about the part which rap plays in the urban black communities in the United States.

Approach

In this thesis, I will relate the issues that occupy a prominent place in the lives of urban black Americans to the extent to which and the way in which these issues are dealt with in the rap lyrics of Public Enemy. My approach in this thesis is a sociological one. I will direct my attention to branches of the so-called Black Studies, a discipline which came into existence in the United States. Black Studies deals with the black community in America. I will particularly pay attention to the branches Black Creative Productions (of which I am convinced rap music is part), Black Politics and Black Social Issues. Black Studies deals with the black community from a black point of view. Most of the time, I will adopt this approach. As a result, I will not express my doubt on every occasion that a radical black point of view is ventilated. Yet, next to this I will test the reliability of some of the issues that are dealt with in this thesis from a white point of view. The rap lyrics that I will use in this thesis are by the rap group Public Enemy. The diversity of the issues that are discussed in rap music is immense. Therefore, I will limit myself to the rap

lyrics of one rap group. By dealing with the rap lyrics of more than one rap group, a superficial contentual analysis would be the highest attainable. I decided to analyse the rap lyrics of Public Enemy, because the rap group highly concentrates on the social and political issues that are important for the black American community. Chuck D., one of the rappers and spokesman of Public Enemy, illustrates the group's affinity with the black community with the words:

Rap is black America's TV station. It gives a whole perspective of what exists and what black life is about.
(van der Stap 1989: 66)

Other rappers and rap groups have the same objectives, but their points of view often change over time. Public Enemy on the other hand, has displayed the same ideological stance for years. Moreover, Public Enemy is the group that has made the message rap into one of the most dominant trends in rap music. Public Enemy is a role model for other rappers. In my opinion, these points provide justification for considering Public Enemy as one of the most important representatives of the message rap.

Marginal Notes

Before explaining how I am going to tackle the issues that are dealt with in this thesis, I have to make a few marginal notes. Firstly, in the above-mentioned definition of rap music it is reported that rap is an urban musical form. Therefore, I will direct my attention to the black Americans who live in the inner city areas. The larger part of the black Americans can be found there. The questions that are dealt with in this thesis are most relevant for them. Henceforth, when I speak of black Americans, I am referring to the blacks in the inner cities of the United States. Secondly, originally rap is the music of American youths of African descent. Although rap music is popular among young people of other minority groups (such as Latinos and Asians) as well, and some of these minorities are regarded as black by white Americans, the term black Americans (or Afro-Americans ¹) denotes Americans of African descent in

¹ In the 1960s, the term Afro-Americans became the fashion under influence of the black radical leaders. In the nineteenth

this thesis. The data which I have collected deal with Afro-Americans. Although other minority groups have to contend with the same problems and the subjects that are discussed in rap lyrics are relevant for them as well, Public Enemy primarily addresses the Afro-American community. Therefore, it would go too far not to limit myself to the Afro-American community.

Realization

In order to depict a clear image of the extent to which and the manner in which social and political issues are dealt with in the rap lyrics of Public Enemy, a number of subjects have to be closely looked at. In chapter 1, I will deal with the rise and development of rap music. It is necessary to do this, because in this discussion the part that rap music plays in the lives of Afro-Americans will come to the fore. Moreover, an overview enables me to place Public Enemy in the history of rap music. In chapter 2, the social questions which are relevant for the black inhabitants of America's inner cities will be related to the rap lyrics of Public Enemy. Hereby, I will try to clarify the situation in the ghettos, as it is described by Public Enemy, with the help of statistical data. Chapter 3 will deal with politics. Firstly, the relative political powerlessness of the black Americans and their dissatisfaction with the political establishment will be discussed. Secondly, I will pay attention to the black political movements which operate outside the political establishment. In this chapter, the sometimes radical theories that find favor in these movements and are put forward by Public Enemy will come up for discussion. In order to succeed in this, a close reading of Public Enemy's rap lyrics is a requisite. In chapter 4, Public Enemy's rap lyrics, music and outward presentation will be placed in a formalistic context. Hereby, I will among other things dedicate a few lines to the subliminal information which is worked into the covers of Public Enemy albums. Finally, in the conclusion, I will link up the social problems that scourge America's inner cities and political issues into a picture in which their underlying relations become visible.

century, the term colored was used, while in the first half of the twentieth century, negro had the preference.

Chapter 1 - The Rise and Development of Rap Music

Earlier Forms of Rap

Before discussing the history of rap in the present-day meaning of the word, it is useful to briefly deal with the meaning of the term rap in earlier times. This goes beyond the limits of my competence. Moreover, the discussion of the earlier forms of rap is not central in this thesis. Therefore, I will mainly base myself on what Gerdy van der Stap says about the earlier forms of rap in "Rap, Zwarte Jongeren Laten Hun Stem Horen".

The oldest form of rap can be found in Africa. In Africa, rap served the purpose of transmitting histories from generation to generation by means of accelerated speech. It seems logical that the elder people in the African communities performed this task, because of their knowledge of life. Except for the rapidity which rap employs, there is also a relation in content between this form of rap and rap in the present-day meaning of the word. After all, it may be assumed that the oldest form of rap was meant to make the younger generation conscious of their identity. This function is, as will be explained later on in this thesis, also very prominent in rap in the present-day meaning of the term.

In the beginning of the twentieth century, black people in the United States developed a manner of communication that is called rap. Several similarities can be detected between this form of rap and rap music. In the first decade of the twentieth century, many Afro-Americans migrated to the industrialized northern states, because of the employment. In the black districts of the large cities, a street culture in which rap had a prominent place, developed. Entire districts were the residence of black Americans. They lived in social isolation, which resulted in the rise of a language that deviates from standard American English: the so-called Black English². The differences between standard American English and Black English

² Black English is also referred to as Black Talk, Black Speech and Jive Talk.

are considerable. There are semantic differences. Many terms that denote negativity in standard American English have a reversed meaning in Black English. The word 'bad' for example, indicates negativity in standard American English. Yet, it denotes positivity in Black English. There can also be found grammatical and phonological differences between standard American English and Black English. Examples of this are respectively 'he like' (in which the [s], which is customary in the third person singular in American English, is deleted) and 'they nice' (in which the [th] is pronounced as a [d])³. Black English seems to be the product of the isolation of the urban Afro-Americans and an attempt to oppose themselves to the language of white Americans (van der Stap 1989: 21-24). Black English is prominently present in rap music. In the street culture of the black ghettos in the inner cities, Black English was part of a speech performance, with which (mainly male) Afro-Americans communicated. This speech performance was also called rap. The term speech performance denotes the manner in which black Americans presented themselves to others in the street culture. Elements of content that were part of rap as speech performance are also present in rap as musical form. Examples of this are boasting or bragging (the extensive description of one's own qualities), dissing (insulting or making a fool of somebody with a sharp remark) and battling (a verbal trial of strength in which dissing and bragging are important elements). Black leaders often employed speech performance-like language and the boxer Muhammad Ali prepared himself mentally for a fight with rhymes that are similar to a rap battle:

Clay swings with a left, Clay swings with a right
Just look at young Cassius carry the fight
Terrell keeps backing but there's not enough room
It's a matter of time until Clay lowers the boom
Then Clay lands with a right, what a beautiful sight
And the punch raised Terrell clear out of the ring
Who on earth thought when they came to the fight
That they would witness the launching of a human

³ See "Rap: Zwarte Jongeren Laten Hun Stem Horen", in which Gerdy van der Stap refers to Labov 1972 and Baugh 1983. I have included these works into my bibliography.

satellite
(van der Stap 1989: 32)

The Rise and Development of Rap as Musical Form

In the beginning of the seventies, a development in the black ghettos of New York City takes place. In this development, rap as speech performance gives the first impulse to the rise of rap in the present-day meaning of the word. On the following pages, the rise and development of rap is described. A discussion of the various styles of raps and illustrations by means of fragments of rap lyrics are included in this. The rappers who have been (or still are) leading personalities will briefly be dealt with.

The usage of rap in popular music is not a phenomenon which was introduced with the rise of rap music. In black American musical styles, it was not unusual that blues, soul, gospel, rhythm and blues and funk artists employed the spoken word once in a while. Next to this, the politically engaged radical poets of the late sixties and early seventies produced poetry which carries the features of a rap song. Both the language and the performance potential of this poetic movement reflect rap lyrics. The work of the black poetess Nikki Giovanni illustrates this:

DO NOT SIT IN DO NOT FOLLOW KING
GO DIRECTLY TO THE STREETS
This is a game you can win
(Nikki Giovanni; Poem For Black Boys)

Rap Music in the Days Before Commercialism

In 1973, DJ Kool Herc ⁴ is the first mobile party jock (a disc jockey with a mobile sound system) who experiments with rare beats on block parties. He creates these beats by simultaneously playing and mixing two different funk records. Kool Herc

⁴ DJ Kool Herc is a Jamaican who settles in the Bronx (New York City) in 1967 to work as a disc jockey. Initially, he plays reggae records. Yet, when it turns out that the New York audience does not respond to reggae, he starts playing funk records.

uses the instrumental parts (the so-called breaks) as well as the instrumental b-sides of records for this purpose. Kool Herc's experiments spring from the urge to control the black youths. In the beginning of the seventies, there were 315 gangs in New York, with a total of 19,503 members ⁵. As a result of continuous confrontations between rivalling gangs, most of the clubs were closed. By increasing the dancability of records by means of the above-mentioned mixing Kool Herc tried to transform the violent rivalry between gang members into dance floor competition. Next to this, Kool Herc yells funny and nonsensical phrases to the audience, in order to create a friendly atmosphere. These phrases often consist of call-and-response games with the audience:

As I scan the place
I see the very familiar face
of my mellow: Wallace Dee in the house
Wallace Dee! Freak for me
(Nation Conscious Rap 1991: XI)

Kool Herc's experiments turn out to be an overwhelming success. Gang wars are (at least at parties) fought out peacefully in so-called dance battles on the dance floor. Moreover, Kool Herc's parties draw an ever growing audience. The excitement that accompanied the new phenomenon is clearly present in the description of one of the teenagers who attended the parties of Kool Herc:

The thing I mostly remember was how loud the music was. The sound overtook you. The place was packed - a real sweatbox. Herc was on the mike. He'd say things like 'Rock the house' and call out the names of the people at the party. Wallace Dee, Johnny Cool, Chubby, the Amazing Bobo, James Bond, Clark Kent, Trixie - those were the names you heard. Trixie had a big Afro and he used to shake his head. It used to make him look so good! Wallace Dee had a move called the slingshot, which was a basic drop to the floor, except he came up like he was shooting a slingshot. After that first time we didn't wanna go anywhere else. It was Kool Herc's, Kool Herc's, Kool

⁵ See Hager 1984: 10.

Herc's. Every weekend. There was no such things as b-boys⁶ when we arrived, but Herc gave us that tag. Just like he named his sound system the Herculords and he called me and my brother the Nigger Twins. He called his dancers b-boys.

(Hager 1984: 32)

In the early days of rap music the emphasis was on the music. The rap lyrics played a subordinate, supporting part. This is illustrated by the words of Grandmaster Caz, a black disc jockey who was involved in rap music from the start:

He [Kool Herc] didn't have any lyrics. Maybe he did that before he came here. But hip hop itself, the hip hop movement started with Kool Herc. Actual rap didn't start until later. It was deejaying and breakdancing at first. Not everybody even had a mic. It was just about your beats. Who had the baddest beats. Me too, I was just deejaying.

(Nation Conscious Rap 1991: XVII)

Innovation and perfection of the beats are responsible for the fact that d.j.s (who imitate Kool Herc in growing numbers as his popularity increases) no longer have time to entertain the audience with comical statements. This is why the so-called MCs (Masters of Ceremony) are hired to take over this task. The Masters of Ceremony were not a new phenomenon. On the contrary, they were present at parties and performances to introduce the various acts. By involving the MCs in the activities of the disc jockeys, the emphasis shifts from the beats to the lyrics. Just like the d.j.s did their best to make their beats as attractive as possible and added new elements to them, the Masters of Ceremony start to elaborate their statements. The evolution of the statements results in long and fairly complicated rhymes. The first steps in the development of a musical genre, which will dominate the popular music industry

⁶ b-boys is the term Kool Herc gave to the male teenagers who danced to the instrumental parts of records (the breaks). The term breakdancing also originates from this. The girls who attended the parties were called fly-girls. The terms b-boy and fly-girl are still used in the hip hop culture. Nowadays, they have become synonymous for boys and girls who participate in hip hop.

in the nineties, are made.

In the description above, the thought is expressed that the youth culture in the black ghettos and rap music are interrelated. That is, the violence in the youth culture generated an urge to end animosity and increase tolerance. The development of the rap beat was the result of this. The positive manner in which the experiments of both disc jockeys and Masters of Ceremony were received on the other hand, motivated them to perfect and innovate their beats and rhymes.

Rap as a Genre of Popular Music: the Old School

In 1979, rap music is discovered by the commercial music industry. Until then, rap is the musical style that is popular only among black youths in the ghettos of New York City. This changes when the Sugar Hill Gang's single "Rapper's Delight" is released. This rapsong, which is based on Chic's "Good Times", becomes a worldwide hit. After this success, Sugar Hill Records, the record company through which "Rapper's Delight" was released, becomes the first label that gives rap bands a chance. Next to this, rap music is recorded by the independent labels Tommy Boy and Enjoy. The phrase "to the hip hop" from "Rapper's Delight" gives the youth culture of which rap is part the name that is henceforth used. Beside rap music, various dance styles and graffiti (all of which developed in the black ghettos) are part of the hip hop culture. As will become clear later on however, the hip hop dances and graffiti gradually become less popular. In the wake of the Sugar Hill Gang, Harlem rapper Kurtis Blow releases "The Breaks" in 1980. In "The Breaks", the interaction between MC and audience which developed in the 1970s is maintained. Even in written form, the call-and-response character of the rapsong is visible:

Breaks on the safe, breaks on the screen, breaks that
make your wallet lean, breaks want gold and breaks want a
cut, simple cuttin myself helped not. But these are the
breaks, break it up, break it up, break it up, break it
down!

(instrumental)

To the girl in brown, stop messin around
crowd: Break it up, break it up!

To the guy in blue, what you're gonna do
crowd: Break it up, break it up!
An to the girl in green, don't be so mean
crowd: Break it up, break it up!
An the guy in red, say what a set!
crowd: Break it up, break it up!
Break it down
(Kurtis Blow; The Breaks)

D.j. Afrika Bambaataa adds a new element to rap music. Bambaataa becomes a disc jockey in 1976, after having struggled out of the gang violence. He establishes the Zulu Nation. The Zulu Nation organisation tries to keep youths away from violence and drug use by focussing on music and dance. The Zulu Nation has without doubt attributed to the development and innovation of the hip hop dances. Bambaataa (he borrowed his name from an African Zulu chief) works fragments of political speeches into his rap records. He also uses the sterile computer sound of the German band Kraftwerk in his songs⁷. This new kind of rap music is called electro rap. Beside, d.j. Grandmaster Flash⁸ (who lives in the Bronx at the time) introduces scratching. Scratching means that a record is moved against the turning direction with the needle on it. Grandmaster Flash also introduces the thematical message rap to the audience. "The Message", released in 1982, becomes a major hit and opens new perspectives for rap music. The rise of the tehmatical rap (besides the message rap, the love rap, the boast rap and the comedic rap become popular) is responsible for the decline of the call-and-response element which was present in the early years of rap music. I have included "The Message" in whole in this thesis, because in my opinion Grandmaster Flash and his rap crew The Furious Five tap an immensely important source of inspiration for future rappers in this rapsong:

It's like a jungle sometimes it makes me wonder how I

7 In 1982, Afrika Bambaataa and the Soul Sonic Force release the album "Planet Rock".

8 Disc jockeys called themselves Grandmaster under the influence of the popularity of the Bruce Lee films. The term signifies the self-consciousness and skill of the d.j.

keep from going under. It's like a jungle sometimes it makes me wonder how I keep from going under.

Broken glass everywhere, people pissin on the stairs, you know they just don't care. I can't take the smell, I can't take the noise, got no money to move out, I guess I got no choice, rats in the front room, roaches in the back. Junkies in the alley with a baseball bat. I tried to get away but I couldn't get far, cause the man from Prudential repossessed my car. Don't push me cause I'm close to the edge. I'm trying not to lose my head. It's like a jungle sometimes it makes me wonder how I keep from going under. Standin on the front stoop, hangin out the window, watchin all the cars go by, roarin as the pieces blow. Crazy lady livin in a bag, eatin out of garbage pails, used to be a brag hag. Such-a-destin-tangle- skip-the-life-an-dangle. With son gone to pris, she seems to lost the switches. Down at the peepshow watchin all the creeps, so she can tell the story to the girls back home. She went to the city an got so social pity she had to get a pet, she couldn't make it on her own.

Don't push me cause I'm close to the edge. I'm trying not to lose my head. It's like a jungle sometimes it makes me wonder how I keep from going under.

My brother doin fast on my mother's t.v., says she watches too much it is just not healthy; 'All My Children' in the daytime 'Dallas' at night, can't even see the game or the Sugar Ray fight. Bill collector they ring my phone, an scare my wife when I'm not home. Got a flunk education, double ditches deflation, can't take the train to the job there's a strike at the station. Lee Ong, King Kong, sittin on my back can't stop to turn around, broke my sacrotilliac. A-midrain-migrain-cancer-limb-wrist-tryin to think of what I'm saying I swear, I might try complainin.

Don't push me cause I'm close to the edge. I'm trying not to lose my head. It's like a jungle sometimes it makes me wonder how I keep from going under.

My son says daddy, I don't wanna go to school, cause the teacher's a jerk, he must think I'm a fool. An all the kids smoke reefer. I think it be cheaper if I just got a job learn how to be a street sweeper. Dance to the beat,

shuffle my feet wear a shirt an tie an run with the creeps. Cause it's all about money ain't a damn thing funny. You gotto have a car in this land of milk an honey. You push that girl in front of the train, took her to the doctor, sow her arms on again. Stab that man right in the heart, gave em a transplant for a brand new start. Can't walk through the park cause it's crazy after dark, keep my hand on my gun cause they got me on the run. I feel like an outlaw, broke my last fast joy, hear them say, you want some more, livin on the sea shore.

Don't push me cause I'm close to the edge. I'm trying not to lose my head. It's like a jungle sometimes it makes me wonder how I keep from going under.

A child is born with no state of mind blind to the ways of mankind. Gotta start along with these frownin two, cause only God knows what you gonna do. You'll grow in the ghetto, livin second rate, an your eyes will sing a song of deep hate. The places you play an where you stay look like one great big alley way. You'll admire all the numberbook takers, dogpitchers, pushers an the big money makers, drivin big cars spendin twenties an tens, an you wanna grow up to be just like them. Smugglers, scramblers, burglars, pickpockets peddlers, eat with pen handlers. You say I'm cool I'm no fool but then you wind up droppin out of high school. Now you're unemployed all non void walkin around like the pretty boy Floyd. Turn stick up kid but look what you done kid, got sent up for eight years pris. Now your manhood is took an you're a mates tag. Spend the next two years as an undercover fag, bein used an abused, serve like hell, till one day you were found hung dead in the cell. It was plain to see that your life was lost, you was cold an your body swung back an forth. But now your eyes sing the sad sad song how you lived so fast and died so young.

So don't push me cause I'm close to the edge. I'm trying not to lose my head. It's a jungle sometimes it makes me wonder how I keep from going under.

(Grandmaster Flash & The Furious Five; The Message)

In "The Message", Grandmaster Flash & The Furious Five focus on a number of serious issues, which people in the black ghettoes have to deal with. Drugs, deplorable housing, violence and poor

education are discussed in "The Message". In the last part of the rapsong, swiftly and accurately a picture is drawn of the life that a child born in the inner city is probably going to lead. As is mentioned above, "The Message" is the first rapsong with a message and had an enormous influence on later generations of rappers.

The Second Wave

In 1983, the popularity of rap music fades temporarily. Other elements of the hip hop culture step into the limelight. Graffiti (the painting on among other things walls and subway trains with felt-tipped pens and aerosols) ⁹, breakdancing (an acrobatic dance style in which jumps and somersaults are incorporated) and electric boogie (a robot-like dance, in which parts of the body make isolated movements) become known around the world very quickly. After a while however, rap music makes a strong comeback. It is hard to pinpoint down when rap regained its popularity. Namely, rap music never really disappeared because of the strong ties between rap music and the hip hop dances. Without rap music, the hip hop dances would never have gained the enormous popularity as they did. Yet, it is true that the content of rap songs was neglected due to the attention to the dances. "Hey You" , the Rock Steady Crew hitsingle of 1983, indicates this process. Rap can be seen separately from the hip hop dance styles, but the dances cannot be without the rap beat. The establishment of the hip hop label Def Jam in 1984 can be seen as the second and final breakthrough of rap music. Rappers such as Kurtis Blow, Afrika Bambaataa and Grandmaster Flash & The Furious Five (who are referred to as the Old School) make way for second generation rappers such as Doug E Fresh, LL Cool J, RUN DMC, Fat Boys and Kool Moe Dee. These rappers, who find the way to the commercial music industry in 1984, are referred to with the term Second Wave ¹⁰.

9 Graffiti rose from the need of gang members to leave their names (the so-called tags) on walls. Over time, the tags became more elaborate and more artistic as graffiti artists started to use aerosols instead of felt-tipped pens.

10 Gerdy van der Stap refers to the second generation of rappers as new jacks in "Rap, Zwarte Jongeren Laten Hun Stem Horen". However, in the hip hop culture this term is used for any young talented rapper who has not yet enjoyed major success. It was

The Second Wave rappers make sure that rap music becomes a full-fledged genre of popular music. The possibility to release hip hop records is highly increased by the establishment of the Def Jam label (1984) ¹¹. Def Jam has perhaps been crucial for the development of rap music. That is, under the influence of the establishment of Def Jam a number of changes take place. In the first place, rap is musically stripped. Only an aggressive beat and scratching remain. This becomes possible because of the presence of a label that exclusively releases hip hop. Rap artists are no longer forced to adapt their beats to the wishes and demands of the major record companies. Likewise, the flamboyant clothes worn by the rappers of the Old School are replaced by the clothes that are worn on the streets, track suits and sports shoes. The thought that rappers no longer have to conform to the image demands of major record companies in order to be accepted could have to do with this. The rap lyrics of RUN DMC, one of the most prominent rap groups of the Second Wave, illustrate this quite radical transformation:

I wear my Adidas when I rock the beat
On stage, frontpage, every show I go
It's Adidas on my feet
High top or low
I like to bought 'm
That's why I brought 'm
A motherfucker tried to steal 'm
That's why I caught 'm
That why I fought 'm
And I walked through the street
And I rock to the beat
With bleed on my leg
And Adidas on my feet
(RUN DMC; My Adidas)

The Fat Boys add a new element to rap music. They introduce the

correct to speak of these rappers as new jacks in 1984. Nowadays however, they are mega-rapstars and often role models for incipient rappers.

¹¹ LL Cool J is the first rapper who releases a record through Def Jam.

human beatbox to the general public ¹² and make it into their trade mark. The human beatbox imitates a drum computer with the mouth. The Second Wave rappers do not introduce any new themes. They limit themselves to innovating and perfecting the themes that came into existence on the streets. The most important of these themes are the boast rap (also known as brag rap or braggadocio rap), the comedic rap, the love rap and the put down rap ¹³.

In the braggadocio rap, the rapper boasts extensively about his own physical or/and mental qualities. LL Cool J is a rapper who among other themes employs the braggadocio rap. The language he uses is quite muscular:

Running from the cops
Making suckers drop
I'm only eighteen
Making more money than your pops
(LL Cool J; ?)

Rapper Kool Moe Dee also employs the boast rap. Yet, he is more refined and mainly concentrates on descriptions of his mental superiority:

Who wants some
Come get it
A battle is a test of wits
And I'm wit it
Hard beats a torch
And I lit it
Stop the music
Alright hit it
Now that it feels good

12 Apart from that, the human beatbox was invented by Doug E Fresh. The human beatbox enabled rappers to accompany their raps with a beat without a drum computer. The inability to buy expensive equipment is probably responsible for the invention of the human beatbox.

13 It has to be made clear that most rappers do not limit themselves to one specific theme. The fragments that are used below, serve the purpose of illustrating the various thematic raps. I do not mean to put the quoted rap artists into a certain category.

I'm heating up
I feed off knowledge
And can't eat enough
(Kool Moe Dee; Knowledge is King)

In the love rap, the rapper presents himself as the best lover. He concentrates on his romantic and sexual escapades. The goal of the put down rap is to portray others in a negative way. The put down rap, that originates from the dissing in rap as speech performance, is often combined with braggadocio. RUN DMC's "Sucker MCs" provides a good example of this:

You're a five-dollar boy and I'm a million-dollar man
You're a sucker MC and you're my fan

You try to bite lines from friends of mine
But you're very banal, you're a sucker MC
You sad-faced clown
(RUN DMC; Sucker MCs)

The comedic rap is aimed to entertain the listener with funny rhymes. Because of its friendly character, the comedic rap attracts a broad audience. This is the reason why many rappers have dedicated themselves to this theme. DJ Jazzy Jeff and the Fresh Prince scored a major hit with the rap "Parents Just Don't Understand", in which parent-child relations are described in an entertaining (and probably recognizable) fashion:

You know, parents all the same, no matter time or place.
They don't understand that a kid is gonna make some mistakes.
So who you are, kids across the land, there's no need to argue
parents just don't understand. I remember one year my mom took me school shoppin', it was me my brother, my mom, oh my father and my little sisters all hopped in the car, we headed downtown to the gallery mall. My mom started digging with the clothes she chose. I didn't say nothin at first. I just turned up my nose. She said "what's wrong, this shirt costs twenty dollars". I said "ma this shirt is plead with a butterfly collar". The next ten times it was the same old thing, my mother

buying me clothes from nineteen sixty three. I say she lost her mind to the ultimate. I asked her for Adidas and she bought me zips. I said "mom what are you doing, you're ruinin my rep". She said "you're only sixteen, you don't have a rep yet". Said "mom, let's put these clothes back please". She said "no you go to school to learn, not for a fashion show".

(DJ Jazzy Jeff and the Fresh Prince; Parents Just Don't Understand)

The growing popularity of rapsongs in which bragging is central seems to have to do with rap music's return to its roots; the streets. The callow beat in which sound-technical gimmicks, like they were present in the electro rap, has been deleted subscribes to the renewed concentration of the street culture. So does the clothing worn by the Second Wave rappers. Nevertheless, as the new jacks of the Second Wave become leading rapstars a tendency can be detected which surfaces in the popularity of expensive sports clothes (Nike), garish golden chains (the so-called dukey ropes) and expensive cars (Mercedes Benz and BMW ¹⁴). It seems fair to say that the success of rap music expresses itself in the material luxury of the professional rap artists.

New Styles in Rapland

In the second half of the eighties, the success of rap music pushes the rappers' belief in their own potential in a radical direction. As a result of this, a new thematic rap, in which rappers flirt with violence and weapons, comes into existence. This new form of thematic rap is referred to as gangster rap. The most striking features of the gangster rap theme are the explicit lyrics and sexism. For the first time in the history of rap music it is not the East Coast that introduces a new element. It are mainly the West Coast rappers who employ the gangster rap theme. Compton, a district in South Central Los Angeles that is known as extremely dangerous, often serves as a

14 Under influence of the rappers' preference to drive Mercedes Benz, this car becomes the ultimate status symbol for hip hop youths. The Mercedes symbols become extremely popular. Because of the fact that many cars are damaged in the attempt to break off the symbols, they can be bought in dump stores.

model for gangster rappers. The gangster rap theme finds its most prominent representatives in Ice T (who refers to himself as the Original Gangsster), NWA (Nigas With Attitude), Ice Cube and the Geto Boys ¹⁵. The fixation of the West Coast rappers on the gangster rap theme can probably be explained by taking the development of the West Coast scene into account. That is, it took some time before the hip hop culture reached the Pacific. At that thime, the gang violence had flared up at the West Coast. Because of the fact that most of the rappers are born and raised in the poorest ghettos, violence is the thing that strikes the eye. The violence which they had to deal with became the theme of their rap lyrics. The fragment of "Mind of a Lunatic" that is printed directly below is representative for the gangster rap theme:

November 1966

A damn fool was born with the mind of a lunatic
I should have been killed
But sista fucked around an let me live
Now I developed a criminal behavior
Fuck with me an I'll slay ya
(Geto Boys; Mind of a Lunatic)

Other rap groups link the use of violence up with the establishment of awareness among the Afro-Americans in the inner cities. In many cases, these rappers are part of the Nation of Islam, an organisation of which I will come to speak later on, and preach the ideology of this movement. The rap theme, which is often referred to as political rap, has its first representatives in Boogie Down Productions and Public Enemy. The latter can be considered to be the most influential. Public Enemy pays attention to the injustice that the black community in the United States has to face. The rap group ventilates the ideas of the radical black leader Louis Farrakhan. Public Enemy revolves around rapper Chuck D. Chuck D. received a college education and is the son of sixties' activists. Moreover, he was trained by the "Afro-American Experience" in his youth. "The Afro-American Experience" is a program of the Black

¹⁵ Geto Boys (pronounced as [geto: boIz]) is a rap band from Houston, Texas. This indicates that rap music has spread over the United States and that rap scenes have come into being in a large number of American cities.

Panther Party. The party's militant influence on Chuck D. can clearly be found in the rap lyrics of Public Enemy.

The Next Generation

At the end of the eighties, a new approach to rap music arises. A number of settled rappers and new jacks lay down the golden chains and replace them with leather medallions (often in the shape of the African Motherland and the colors yellow, green and red). These rappers also renounce expensive sports clothing. This tendency can be explained with the help of two factors. In the first place, a large number of rap artists no longer want to be dressed like the drug dealers in the ghettos. These drug dealers tend to imitate the clothing of the successful rappers. Rappers believe that the children in the ghettos are tempted to engage in the drugs business when they see the material luxuries of the drug dealers. In other words, the positive image that black youths are supposed to have of rap artists and their wish to be successful in a legal manner is undermined when children see the ease with which drug dealers can afford the same wealth. Secondly, the growth of the black consciousness plays a part in this tendency. The presence of a leader with charisma has revived the interest in the Nation of Islam. The emphasis of the Nation of Islam on the African identity of black Americans can be traced in the attitude and lyrics of many rappers. The rappers who are regarded as part of this movement are referred to with the term Next Generation. Representatives are Jungle Brothers, De La Soul, A Tribe Called Quest and Prince Akeem. The rappers of the Next Generation often concentrate on the education of the black teenagers in the United States. Yet, humorous rap lyrics are also very important to them. Therefore, their raps are sometimes called edutainment¹⁶. Having a positive influence on the hip hop youth is their most important objective. In the rapsong "Jimbrowski", Jungle Brothers illuminate the Aids problem in an attractive, humorous fashion:

Here is the message of the superhose
Just keep in mind when Jimmy grows and grows and grows

16 The term edutainment is a contraction of the words education and entertainment.

So let it
But keep in mind about the epidemic
When Jimmy releases, boy it pleases
But what do you do about all these diseases
Jimmy is Jimmy no matter what
So take it a Jimmy cause you know what's up
Cause now in winter Aids attacks
So run out and get your Jimmy hat
It costs so little for a pack-of-three
That Jimmy hats for the winter attack
Good for a present, great for lovers
Demonstrated by the Jungle Brothers
So check your Jimmy and keep it fresh
(Jungle Brothers; Jimbrowski)

Rapper Prince Akeem presents himself as a teacher in "Respect and Protect the Black Woman":

Like a flower blossoming and showing its beauty
Respect and protect the Black Woman my duty
I'm rapping, not singing but expressing the view
That our women are Queens man, that's true
So honor them and cherish them I hope you abide
The woman is my partner she's always on my side
Not my leg, my feet, my stomach or my back
I'll give you a beating if you try to attack
The Black Woman
(Prince Akeem; Respect and Protect the Black Woman)

At the beginning of the 1990s, many different styles can be distinguished in rap music. It has to be explicitly mentioned that the innovations within rap that have been discussed above do not mean that older styles and themes have disappeared. Moreover, Old School rap artists such as Afrika Bambaataa and Kurtis Blow, and Second Wave rappers such as LL Cool J and RUN DMC, are still involved in hip hop music. The gangster rap, a theme that has brought Ice T, NWA and Geto Boys enormous popularity, has not lost its attraction. Many young, incipient rappers direct themselves to this theme. As a result of this popularity, gangster rappers go more and more into extremes. The descriptions of the without doubt harsh life in the black ghettos of the American inner cities are in immanent danger of

losing their credibility. The politically and socially oriented rap forms an important part of the rap supply. The renewed interest of black teenagers in the radical ideas of the Nation of Islam and the successes of rap groups such as Public Enemy and Boogie Down Productions have caused the rise of a large number of rappers with a political vocation ¹⁷.

Female Rappers

Female rappers used to be quite rare. The tough image of hip hop seemed to stand in the way of the active participation of girls in rap. In the beginning of the 1980s, when the first rapsongs were put on record, a number of rap groups had a female member. An example of such mixed rap groups is Funky Four Plus One More. Next to this, there were all-girl rap bands. Most of the all-girl rap groups were soon terminated. Firstly, they were not very successful, though their style did not really differ from male rappers' styles. This indicates that girls were not easily accepted in hip hop, which has its roots in the male-oriented street culture. Secondly, the short duration of female rap groups can be explained by pointing out that girls tend to lose interest in rap as they grow older. That is, most of them consider bragging unladilike when they get older. In the second half of the 1980s, there are only two female rap groups who regularly and with some success release records; Salt'n Pepa and Wee Pappa Girl Rappers ¹⁸. Especially Salt'n Pepa are successful with the humoristic braggadocio raps on their debut album "Salt with a Deadly Pepa" ¹⁹:

I went to a party, the other day around the way, with my partner, her name is d.e.e. d.e.e. We were dressed to kill, baby, an willin to make a killin, met Spinderella at the door. What was she doing? Cold chillin. We walked to the side, a man asked us three for I.D. When he found out who we was, he said, go ahead girls, off you go, it's free, the drinks are on the house, anything you want is

17 Examples of this generation of politically engaged rappers are Poor Righteous Teachers, Paris, Two Kings in a Cipher, Brand Nubian and Ed O.G. and the Bulldogs.

18 With the single "Faith" they were quite successful.

19 This album was released in 1988.

yours. The he gave us the keys to the V.I.P. doors. I said, hey you, I like it like that, hey you I like it like this, and if I had a wish, before I die, I'd like to have it like this for the rest of my life
(Salt 'n Pepa; I Like It Like That)

In imitation of male rap groups such as NWA, female rappers appear who do not shun violence in their rap lyrics. One of these rappers is YoYo, a female rapper who is part of Ice Cube's Lench Mob. Other female representatives of the gangster rap theme are the girls of BWP (Bythes With Problems). Queen Latifah, May May and New York rapper MC Lyte (who among other things raps about man-woman relationships and the dangers to which black males in the ghettos are subject) are moderately appreciated by the hip hop audience:

The ladies will kick it, the rhyme it is wicked
Those who don't know how to be pros get evicted
A woman can bear you, break you, take you
Now it's time to rhyme. Can you relate to
A sister dope enough to make you holler and scream
(Queen Latifah; Ladies First)

The same applies to the less rough Ms Melody (the wife of KRS-One of Boogie Down Productions) and her sister Ms Harmony. The political rap theme has a pronounced representative in Sister Souljah, a female rapper who is heavily influenced by the ideology of the Nation of Islam. Sister Souljah has joined forces with Public Enemy on the album "Apocalypse 91: The Enemy Strikes Black". The more dominant presence of female rappers in the beginning of the nineties seems to be related to the renewed interest in the Nation of Islam. This movement tries to treat the black woman with respect and concentrates on the presentation of serious issues in rap music. This enables female rappers to pay attention to issues without having to resort to bragging. So, girls can participate in hip hop without acting unladilike.

White Rappers

Rap is the musical form of black American youths. White people

hardly participate actively in rap music. The few white rappers are considered as thieves by the hip hop audience and black rappers. In Nation Conscious Rap, a black rappers speaks of white rappers:

But it's also a dreadful day. It's a dreadful day for a cracker like Vanilla Ice. Like a thief in the night, after you bled, and you suffered to create, and to form and to give rap music to the people, like a thief in the night this no good, low down cracker comes and steals it from you.

(Nation Conscious Rap 1991: 229)

The thought that whites have stolen rap music from the Afro-Americans is related to the opinion that white rappers lack authenticity. Black rappers believe that in order to produce rap music, a ghetto background is obligatory. Most white rappers are in want of such a background. Third Bass, of which two out of three members are white, and Beastie Boys are the only two rap groups who are completely accepted by the hip hop audience. Most of the other white rappers, such a Vanilla Ice and Marky Mark, seem to be products of the major record companies, most of which are controlled by whites. Technically speaking they produce rap. Yet, their rapsongs are not primarily aimed at a black audience, but at the broader public of white youths. As a result, Afro-Americans cannot identify with these rappers. Nevertheless, some white rappers are very successful. Afro-Americans explain this popularity by pointing at the racist attitude of the white-controlled radio stations. They believe that white rappers get airplay because of the color of their skin, not because of their talent.

Cross-over

At the end of the 1980s, a development which needs to be briefly looked at takes place. The so-called house music is at the centre of this development. House music came into existence in Chicago in 1980 and developed independently of rap. Several differences between rap and house music can be detected. Firstly, rap music is a lyrical form. House music on the other hand, focuses completely on dance entertainment. As a result, lyrics are subordinate in house music. Secondly, the beat in

house music is considerably faster. The average speed of the rap beat amounts to 112 beats per minute (bpm), while the house beat comes to at least 130 beats per minute. There is only one similarity between rap and house music. That is, rap originally (especially in the period before rap music was discovered by the commercial music industry) served the purpose of adding to the pleasure on the dance floor.

Rap is a musical form that lends itself admirably to the purpose of cross-over with other musical styles. This becomes clear in 1986, when the cooperation between RUN DMC and the heavy metal band Aerosmith results in the release of an extremely successful version of the song "Walk this Way". After this successful cross-over, many rappers make use of metal guitars, while heavy metal bands sometimes resort to rap ²⁰. Cross-overs of rap music and reggae and jazz have been viable as well ²¹.

More and more, house music makes use of rap music. This tendency may have a negative impact on the way in which people listen to rap music. Despite the independent development of rap and house music, the beats sometimes sound alike. As a result of this, rap and house may become confusing terms. Combined with house music's status as the ultimate dance music, teenagers who come into contact with house in which rap is used could fail to see the differences between house and rap ²². The lyrical side of rap could as a result be neglected, which would mean that rap music loses a part of its power as a mouthpiece of the Afro-Americans. I am aware of the fact that many of the Afro-American youths come into contact with authentic rap music. I think that this group can distinguish between rap and house music quite easily. Nevertheless, I am convinced that young people who are not directly involved in the hip hop culture can fail to see the differences between rap and house and categorise rap as dance music. As a result, they may not

20 Gangster rapper Ice T recorded an entire album ('Body Count') with his speed metal band Body Count in 1992. Public Enemy even played with the trash/speed metal band Anthrax on their 'Bring Tha Noiz' tour in 1991.

21 The cross-over of rap and reggae is called ragga.

22 This cross-over is referred to as hip house when the rap lyrics have a considerable part in a song.

pay attention to the rap lyrics. In my opinion, this possibility must not be underestimated. Moreover, the more house music makes use of rap, the more the borders between the two will blur. From conversations I had with Dutch teenagers ²³ I learned that a large number of youths failed to correctly categorise rap and house music. Moreover, very few people were able to sum up the subject that are dealt with in rap.

Chronology

I would like to end this chapter, which for the larger part has been dedicated to the description of the rise and development of rap music, with a chronology in which the events I consider most significant are included.

1973;

Disc jockey Kool Herc lays the foundation for the beat of rap music by mixing the instrumental parts of funkrecords.

1979;

Rap music becomes known all over the world as the Sugar Hill Gang releases their single "Rapper's Delight". They clear the way to the commercial music industry for the Old School rappers. Kurtis Blow, Grandmaster Flash & The Furious Five and Afrika Bambaataa & The Soul Sonic Force are the most successful rappers of the Old School.

1982;

With their song "The Message" Grandmaster Flash & The Furious Five introduce the thematic rap-with-a-message to the general public. Thus they set an important trend that will be a source of inspiration for future rappers.

1982;

Afrika Bambaataa introduces a rap style that is referred to as electro rap, when the album "Planet Rock" is released.

1984;

The first hip hop label, Def Jam, is established. Def Jam is responsible for the rise of the second generation rappers. These are referred to as the Second Wave. The most important representatives are:
RUN DMC; this rap band changes the look

²³ These teenagers were not active participants in hip hop. That is, they listened to rap music or bought rap records, but they did not engage in the hip hop lifestyle.

of hip hop by means of their unfledged raps and street-like clothes.

LL Cool J; the first rapper who releases an album through Def Jam.

Doug E Fresh;

Beastie Boys; the first white rap group whose cross-over of hip hop and heavy metal is fully embraced by the audience (Licensed To Ill ('86)).

Fat Boys; who employ the comedic rap and make the human beatbox into their trade mark.

Whodini;

Eric B. & Rakim;

Big Daddy Kane;

Mantronix;

The Second Wave rappers concentrate on innovation of the love rap, put down rap, braggadocio rap and message rap; themes which were already in existence.

1987;

On the West Coast of the United States the first gangster rappers Ice T (Rhyme Pays ('87)) and NWA (Straight Outta Compton ('88)) appear who use their creativity to rap about violence, drugs and sex.

In the nineties, the gangster rap becomes one of the most popular themes in rap music.

1987;

Public Enemy (Yo! Bum Rush The Show ('87)) and Boogie Down Productions (Criminal Minded ('87)) give shape to the renewed interest in radical black politics in the political rap, in which black awareness is linked to the use of violence.

The political rap becomes enormously popular as well and is a source of inspiration for among others Paris, Poor Righteous Teachers and X-Klan.

1988;

A group of rappers, who are referred to as the Next Generation, develop a new approach to rap music. In this approach, the motherland Africa is central.

The Next Generation rappers distinguish themselves from other rappers by means of their non-posing rap style. Jungle Brothers (Straight Out of the Jungle ('88)) and De La Soul (Feet High and Rising ('88)) are the first representatives. Later they are among others joined by A Tribe Called Quest (Low End Theory ('91)) and UMCs (Fruits of Nature ('91)).

1992

The Old School, the Second Wave and the Next Generation are terms that are used to denote the various rap styles, each with its own characteristics. Next to this, the Old School signifies a period in the history of rap music. That is, the style of the Old School rappers is outstanding for the early eighties. In later years, most of the characteristics of the Old School style have been abandoned (in the chronology this is indicated by the singular line). This does certainly not count for the Second Wave and the Next Generation. The fact that elements of the Second Wave and the Next Generation are still present in rap music is in the chronology indicated by the double line.

Chapter 2 - Public Enemy and Social Issues

Well I love rap music ... and I love Public Enemy, because ... they have some consciousness ... because of Public Enemy, a whole lot of guys will have to redetermine their content ... they're gonna have to make a serious change, because that other stuff ... the kids don't even want to hear that stuff anymore. You're gonna have to have some content, some substance. That's what people want now, that other stuff is played out ...

- Spike Lee

In this chapter, I will look at the rap lyrics of Public Enemy in detail and place them in the larger context of the social problems which the Afro-American community in the inner cities has to deal with. Public Enemy concentrates on describing the social problems in the inner cities. Therefore, their rap lyrics lend themselves perfectly for the purpose of analyzing various social issues. Before beginning this analysis, I would like to dwell on the activities of the rap group and the background of its members.

Public Enemy

Public Enemy was established by Chuck D.²⁴ (Carlton Ridenhour). He is the son of Afro-Americans who were involved in the Civil Rights Movement in the sixties. In his childhood, Chuck D. is trained by the Black Panther Party when he participated in the 'Afro-American Experience' program. In 1984, Chuck D. is studying to be a graphical designer in Long Island. In his spare time, he is occupied in the propagation of the hip hop culture. As a disc jockey of the university radio station WBAU, he plays rap music. Moreover, he explains the rap lyrics to the listeners. At the radio station he comes into contact with the future members of Public Enemy: Flavor Flav (William Drayton), Terminator X (Norman Rogers) and Professor Griff²⁵. Together

24 The D. stands for Dangerous.

25 The real name of Professor Griff is unknown.

they establish Public Enemy. Chuck D. and Flavor Flav account for most of the lyrics. Terminator X is the disc jockey of the rap group and Professor Griff has a part as Minister of Information. This means that he is occupied with the intellectual side of Public Enemy's rap lyrics. Initially, the rap group limits itself to performances at parties. Hereby, they are accompanied with their own security, the Security of the First World, of whom some are members of the Fruit of Islam, the youth department of the Nation of Islam. In 1987, the first Public Enemy album 'Yo! Bum Rush The Show' is released. This album is one of the first rap records with a lyric sheet, which indicates that Public Enemy attaches much importance to the rap lyrics. 'It Takes A Nation Of Millions To Hold Us Back' comes out one year later. The third album, 'Fear Of A Black Planet', is released in 1990. 'Fear Of A Black Planet' contains 'Fight The Power' , the rapsong that is the sound track of Spike Lee's film 'Do The Right Thing'. By then, Public Enemy is established as one of the most leading rap groups. Besides in his rapsongs, Chuck D. ventilates his ideas in speeches which he delivers throughout the country. The most recent album of Public Enemy is 'Apocalypse 91: The Enemy Strikes Black'. This record comes out in 1991. Professor Griff has left the rap group by then, because of his radical points of view. In 1990, Public Enemy narrowly escaped an assault by a Jewish terrorist, who was agitated by the anit-semitic statements of Professor Griff. On 'Apocalypse 91: The Enemy Strikes Black', his place is taken by Sister Souljah, an Afro-American woman with a university education and emancipatory points of view. The most striking feature of Public Enemy's music is the use of the so-called noise (counter-tones). The use of siren-like sounds, which can be heard on many of Public Enemy's songs, are an example of this. As a result of noise, the music becomes dismal. This is exactly the aim of Public Enemy. They want their music to be a reflection of real life.

Deterioration of the Living Conditions

I started college in '85. Reagan was in full swing, and his administration with the Bush administration was one of intolerance. Intolerance resurfaced, and it became en vogue to be non accepting. People were

fed up with our problems as if they were ever tolerant in the first place. Now it was openly alright to oppose civil rights legislation. They've proven throughout the course of history that they want to end us, to finish us, and kill us off. This was just confirmed in the clearest of light these past two administrations.

- Paris

For the larger part, the eighties have passed under the leadership of Ronald Reagan. During the two terms of office he has completed, the American economy has come to an end. The domestic policy was pushed into the background by the Conservative focus on foreign affairs. Especially the arms race, which was still in full swing during the Reagan Administration, pressed hard upon America's budget ²⁶. The negative results of the neglect of domestic affairs show themselves very clearly in the early nineties. The economy of the United States has to contend with huge structural shortcomings. Attempts to reorganize the American industry are attended with mass discharges. The groups in American society that are socially-economically weak, are affected most by this. That is, the people in these groups, who live at or just above the minimum of existence, often earn their bread with unschooled labor. Especially in the untrained sector people are discharged first. Moreover, the number of discharged is the highest in this sector. The possibilities to find new employment are few, because of the poor education of these people. As a result of this, the underclass in American society, with which the Americans who live below the minimum of existence are denoted, is rapidly increasing ²⁷. The American government does hardly anything to help the people in the underclass. Expenses for social facilities have been frozen, curtailed or even cancelled by the Reagan Administration. Under the leadership of president Bush this has hardly changed. Consequently, many poor Americans live under deplorable conditions.

26 The development of the space defense system SDI and the (on radar) nearly invisible Stealth bomber are only two examples of military projects that devoured enormous amounts of dollars.

27 The government has fixed the minimum of existence at 9,069 dollars for a four person family annually.

The volume of the underclass in the United States has grown considerably. 50 % of the underclass is white, 30 % is black. Taking into account that the Afro-Americans represent approximately 12 % of the population, it becomes clear that a relatively large number of the Afro-Americans belong to the underclass. Moreover, 90 % of the poor Afro-Americans live in the large cities. For whites, this percentage amounts to 30 %. The social issues that are discussed below, are especially present in the American inner cities. Therefore, they are primarily relevant to the lives of the poor black Americans.

Drugs

Drugs are an enormous problem in the United States. In the 1960s, heroin was the drug that made many victims. Yet, gradually cocaine has taken control of the United States. The United States are the world's largest consumer of cocaine. Annually, between 60 and 120 billion dollars are invested in the drugs economy. An estimated 15 to 20 billion dollars are employed in cocaine every year. At a computation, 10 % of the American population is a regular user of drugs. More than one third of all teenagers is a regular user, mostly of crack cocaine (NRC Handelsblad 2/5/88).

So I said sophisticated B.²⁸, don't be one
Not to heed the crack of dawn
Or is it the dawn of crack
Stop the talk they say, but
We talk and say what's right or wrong
Some say we wasting time singin' a song
(Public Enemy; Revolutionary Generation)

The king of New York
Crack a lack attack on the black
To crack the back
(Public Enemy; Nighttrain)

Since 1983, a powerful drug has spread from Los Angeles over the United States: crack cocaine. Crack cocaine controls the

²⁸ Here, the capital B. stands for Black.

streets of the inner cities of America. Crack is a cocaine derivative²⁹, which is more addictive than heroin. Next to this, the extent of the crack addiction surpasses the heroin problem of the sixties and seventies. In some of the black neighborhoods of the inner cities, 40 % of the male population is addicted to crack and/or alcohol.

Race conscious Afro-Americans such as the members of Public Enemy are concerned about crack, because it is the drug of the poor, and therefore to a large extent of the black Americans. That is, crack is exceptionally cheap. On the streets, the price of one tenth of a gram, which is sufficient for a so-called high of about five minutes, amounts to ten dollars. Over and above that, crack is very addictive. This is a result of the synthetic structure of the drug. Crack use has destructive consequences for both body and mind. As a result of crack addiction, affections of the heart can occur, which may even be lethal. Mental disturbances of crack addiction are paranoia, aggressive behavior and hallucinations. Public Enemy brings this up in 'Mega-Blast':

Time is gettin' crazy - people clockin' out
They're robbin' all the cribs on a death wish route
Breakin' into cars tryin' to steal their system
20 pounds on a bar - betcha can't lift 'em

Ya throw two punches - now you got no wind
Hittin' mega pipes - gettin' super stupid thin
(Public Enemy; Mega-blast)

The superintendent of a drug clinic in New York comments on the destructive nature of crack with the following words: 'In my twenty years in the business, I've never seen anything like it. I've seen kids on angel dust, acid, speed, heroin and cocaine, but I've never seen a drug destroy a person as quickly as crack' (van der Stap 1989: 11).

29 Cocaine powder is converted into crack by means of heating and mixing with water. This takes away part of the impurity of cocaine.

Flavor Flav, one of the rappers of Public Enemy, explains the group's fixation on drugs. He believes that crack facilitates the self-destruction of the Afro-Americans. He answers the question why he speaks about the self-destruction of the black Americans with the following words:

The reason why I say self destruction is because we have black brothers and sisters on the corners selling drugs to our black brothers and sisters. We have little kids, 10 years old out there getting drugs from their older brothers and sisters, which is self destruction. Why? Because there brothers and sisters are us, and we are destroying ourselves. And another thing that we try to work on is mainly ... okay you have a lot of black people in our neighborhoods that don't like to see each other with nothin'. There's a form of jealousy. We're trying to get all of this wiped away. See I'm going to tell you like this, while we're busy fightin' each other off, killin' each other off, think about it brother, the Ku Klux Klan have little private camps teaching their little babies how to come kickin' in our doors, and shoot anything in sight. So while we're killin' each other off they're steady gettin' busy. So that's why they put drugs in our neighborhoods, so that way there could be a day to where they can come and conquer us all, and then there can be a white world. NO!

(Nation Conscious Rap 1991: 313-314)

Public Enemy does not believe that the American government is taking sufficient action to fight the drug problem. The approach of the government does not really create the impression that they want to combat drug addiction. In the eighties, under the Reagan Administration, Nancy Reagan started the anti-drug campagne 'Just Say No'. This seems to be a favorable initiative. Yet, the budget for drug education, drug prevention and drug treatment has been reduced with 40 %. The soft approach that concentrates on treatment and rehabilitation of drug addicts ³⁰ is regarded as coddling the users by the Reagan Administration. Instead, the American government has chosen for the hard approach, which is characterized by a more severe

30 The soft approach is pursued in the Netherlands.

penal legislation for drug dealers and drug users ³¹. The hard approach is attended by serious consequences. It precludes the possibility to provide drug users with clean needles ³². Due to being dependent on used needles, the Aids virus has swiftly spread among drug addicts. The Afro-Americans in the inner cities have to suffer for this ³³. Public Enemy warns against the Aids epidemic, and relates Aids to drug use in the rapsong 'Meet The G. That Killed Me':

Man to man
I don't know if they can
From what I know
The parts don't fit
(Ahh, shit)
Now he's sharing a needle
With a drug addict
He don't believe he has it
(Either)
But now he does, he doesn't know cause he
Goes straight to a ho³⁴
Tell you what who was next on the butt
Wild thingin'³⁵ on a germ
Runnin' wild
Yo stop
But the bag popped
Damn!
(Public Enemy; Meet The G. That Killed Me)

Making the connection between drug use and infection with the HIV virus in rap lyrics, can be a tool to educate Afro-American

31 In order to illustrate this process: in 1988 a bill was passed which enabled the government to sentence small time dealers, who were caught in possession of a few grams of crack, to seven years imprisonment.

32 In 1987, Johnson, the special prosecutor who deals with narcotics in New York, said that providing drug addicts with needles is 'the promotion of a crime', which is punishable with maximally one year confinement.

33 Altogether, 18 % of the 55,167 Aids victims in 1988 were drug users. 36 % of the Aids-infected drug addicts are black.

34 This is Black English for whore.

35 Slang expression for having sexual intercourse.

youths about Aids. Moreover, discussing the relation between drugs and Aids may keep youths from using drugs. Public Enemy also points at the spread of Aids through homosexual contacts. The part of the rapsong where this is done (Man to man/I don't know if they can/From what I know/The parts don't fit/(Ahh shit)) may be considered humorous by some people, yet the rap group speaks about homosexuality in a spiteful way as well. Public Enemy (and other rappers as well) are often reproached for this. Their attitude would ventilate anti-homosexuality ³⁶ This homophobic demeanor can be explained by pointing at the male, tough nature of the street culture in which rap has its roots.

In order to be able to satisfy their drug addiction, many Afro-Americans have to deal drugs or steal to obtain money. Enormous amounts of money circulate in the crack business. It is hard for the black youths who live in the hopelessness of the ghettos to resist the temptation to work for a drug dealer. Working for a dealer is synonymous for a fast way of making money. Boys, who are often not older than ten years, earn a hundred dollars a day as a look-out for a dealer. Older children work as drug couriers (the so-called hustlers), which daily pays two hundred dollars. The cleverest of these boys can become dealers themselves. In this 'occupation', daily revenues of two thousand dollars are not exceptional (Nederlands Dagblad 2/6/88).

Most rappers do not sharply criticise Afro-American drug dealers. Public Enemy takes this stance as well. The members of the group do not approve that black Americans deal drugs. Yet, they understand that many Afro-Americans have to resort to the drug business in order to escape the ghetto's poverty. Therefore, Public Enemy holds the white people responsible for the drug problem in the black ghettos:

Q: What would you say to drug dealers?

Flavor Flav: That I feel sorry for them. I understand why they're doing it, but it's wrong. They've been programmed. But not only that they've been trained to

³⁶ West Coast rapper Ice Cube has been much criticised for his anti-homosexuality statements on his album 'Death Certificate'.

think "damn this is the only means of getting money. It's the only way I can survive. Damn, I done dropped out of school, I ain't got no job, all I can do is ..."

(Nation Conscious Rap 1991: 316)

Besides to crack, a large number of Afro-Americans in the inner cities are addicted to alcohol. Although crack sooner works on the body and mind of the user than alcohol, alcohol addiction facilitates violence and criminal behavior as well. Black leaders have drawn the people's attention to the need to reduce the large number of liquor stores in the black neighborhoods. Prominent Afro-Americans, among other areas from the sports and entertainment world, have been asked not to contribute to alcohol commercials. To illustrate this, a controversy in the American rap scene has risen around Ice Cube, who did a commercial for St. Ides malt liquor. In the February edition of hip hop magazine The Source, a reader says in a received letter: 'You stated that 'St. Ides is enjoyed by millions of healthy, happy, law-abiding people', but forgot to mention that it is targeted at millions of low-income, unhappy, adolescent black males'.

Public Enemy pays attention to the excessive alcohol consumption in the black neighborhoods and the destructive effects for body and mind in the rapsong 'One Million Bottlebags':

One Million Bottlebags count 'em
Think they can bounce the ounce
And it get 'em
Yo black spend 288 million
Sittin' there waitin' for the fizz ³⁷
And don't know what the fuck it is
An oh lemme tell you 'bout shorty
He about seventeen lookin' like forty
Treats his 40 ³⁸ dog better than his g³⁹
When he gets a big b-o-t-t-l-e
Oh he loves tha liquor
But look watch shorty get sicker

37 taxes

38 beer brand

39 The g stands for girlfriend.

Year after year
While he's thinkin' it's beer
But it's not but he got it in his gut
So what the fuck
Yo niga what's up
Now he's hostile to a brother lookin' out
But I ain't mad I know what he about
He's just a slave to the bottle and the can
'Cause that's his man
The malt liquor man
One million bags count 'em all
Other man gets happy [A]
Watch the killas drink 8 ball
Don't know a damn thing
But his breath stinkin'
Then I ask a question you brother
What the fuck is you drinkin'
He don't know but it flow
Out the bottle in a cup
He call it gettin' fucked up
Like we ain't fucked up already
See the man they call Crazy Eddie
Liquor man with the bottle in his hand
He give the liquor man ten to begin
Wit' no change and he run
To get his brains rearranged
Serve it to the home they're able
To do without a table
Beside what's inside ain't on the label
They drink it thinkin' it's good
But they don't sell the shit in the white neighborhood
Exposin' the plan they get mad at me I understand [B]
They're slaves to the liquor man
Back to my homeboy shorty
He can drink it down
And think nuttin' about it
Pass it around and get tha 40 dog buzz ⁴⁰
At the same time
Shorty can't remember what day it was
Say I'm tellin' is fact

40 get a kick (in this case out of getting drunk).

Genocide kickin' in yo back [C]
How many times have you seen
A black fight a black
After drinkin' down a bottle
Or a malt liquor six-pack
Malt liquor bull⁴¹
What it is is bullshit Colt
45 Another gun to the brain
Who's sellin' us pain
In the hood another up to no good
Plan that's designed by the other man [D]
But who drink ik like water
One and on till the stores reorder it
Brothers cry broke but they still affordin' it
Sippin' it lick it drink it down oh nooo
Drinkin' poison but they don't know it
It used to be wine
A dollar and a dime
Same man, drink in another time
They could be hard as hell and don't give a damn
But still be a sucker to the liquor man
(Public Enemy; One Million Bottlebags)

In this rap song, Public Enemy tries to place the Afro-American population in possession of all the facts concerning the dangers of alcohol consumption. Chuck D. focuses on beer, because this article of consumption is on the fourth place in the list of articles sold in the Afro-American community ⁴². Chuck D. does not simply say that alcohol endangers one's health. That would probably produce no effect. Instead, he emphasizes the possibility of a white conspiracy. In this conspiracy, alcohol is a tool to keep a tight hand over the Afro-Americans. In the first place, Public Enemy refers to the enormous amount of money (200 million dollars) which are thrown away on alcohol and which fills the pockets of the government (Yo black spend 200 million/Sittin' there waitin' for the fizz). Secondly, in 'One Million Bottlebags' Public Enemy stresses the fact that the beer that is sold in the black

41 This is a reference to the Red Bull brand.

42 Beer sale to Afro-Americans is only surpassed by eggs, milk and bread.

neighborhoods is of inferior quality. This beer, the so-called malt liquor, is not beer, but the brew that remains after the preparation of real beer such as Heineken and Budweiser. Chuck D. refers to the inferior quality by remarking that malt liquor is not sold to whites (But they don't sell the shit in the white neighborhood). The view that the sale of malt liquor to Afro-Americans is meant to keep them down is clearly ventilated in the rap lines:

Other man gets happy [A]
Exposin' the plan ... [B]
Genocide kickin' in yo back [C]
Plan that's designed by the other man [D]

It seems as if Public Enemy blames the whites (the other man) for the alcohol problem, in order to prevent black Americans from excessive drinking and to create unity among blacks by referring to the possibility of a white conspiracy.

The more radical Afro-Americans, to whom Public Enemy can be counted, regard the drug problem that scourges the inner cities of the United States as a tool to influence black life in a negative fashion and oppress the black consciousness. The large number of liquor stores in the black neighborhoods and crack (developed by the American government and pumped into the ghettos by the CIA) serve this purpose. This theory seems far-fetched. In fact, there is no concrete evidence. Yet, the extremely low price and the destructive effects of crack set one thinking. What is the purpose of a drug for the poorest people (more affluent Americans use other drugs because of the dangers that attend crack use) when a much larger profit can be made with cocaine? The increase in the number of Afro-Americans arrested and convicted for drug use and drug criminality (which is discussed below) subscribes to the possibility of a white conspiracy.

Violence

An important social problem that black Americans have to face up to is the violence in American society. Because of the large scale possession of fire arms in the United States, all Americans, white, black and other groups of the population run

a considerable risk to become involved in violence. An estimated 120 million fire arms were in the possession of American households in 1988 (Tijdschrift voor de Sociale Sector september 1987)⁴³.

The large number of fire-arms in the possession of civilians is responsible for the fact that force of arms has become cause of death number one in some states. Afro-Americans run a higher risk than white people. The Bureau of Justice Statistics has calculated that for every white American who dies because of force of arms, six black Americans die a violent death. Especially in the drug scene and in the wars between juvenile gangs, many Afro-Americans become the victim of violence.

The members of Public Enemy are aware that the rates of black on black violence are extremely high. On 'Apocalypse 91: The Enemy Strikes Black' they focus on this problem. Instead of urging black youth to stop the violence, they deal with black on black violence from a white point of view. A voice with a distinct southern accent says:

Howdy y'all. This is Burning Cross House ⁴⁴, yours truly of the KKK. I'd like to express our deepest gratitude at the destruction of the inferior nigger race. And I'm especially pleased to report it's destroying itself without our help. To all you gangs, hoodlums, drug pushers and users and other worthless niggers killing each other off; we'd like to thank y'all for saving us the time, trouble and legality for the final chapter of ridding y'all off the face of the earth. Your solution to our problem is greatly appreciated. So keep selling us yo soul. Thank ya!

(Public Enemy; Get The F--- Outta Dodge)

By letting a member of the Klu Klux Klan express his gratitude at the destruction of the black race as a result of black on

⁴³ In Florida, 26,086 fire-arms licences were taken out between 10/1/87 and 2/25/88. In this state, the last threshold that slows down the possession of fire-arms was removed when a wait of 78 hours (during which the background of the buyer was checked) was abolished (Elseviers Magazine 7/5/88).

⁴⁴ The Klu Klux Klan has the habit of burning crosses in order to intimidate the Afro-Americans.

black violence, Public Enemy tries to shock the young black males. It is the racist philosophy of the Klu Klux Klan that is displayed in this fragment. Yet, according to the more radical Afro-Americans, this philosophy is shared by the American government and the majority of the white civilians. The fragment confronts race conscious Afro-Americans with a period in which it was legal to regard black people as inferior. Several factors bring this about. In the first place, the content of the lyrics intend to activate black people's anger and anxiety about the racist attitude of white Americans. The terms 'nigger', 'inferior' and the phrase 'saving us [KKK] the time, trouble and legality for the final chapter of ridding y'all off the face of the earth' aim at this. In this context, especially the word 'legality' expresses Public Enemy's concern with the revival of sentiments that were rampant in the days before the Civil Rights Movement. Secondly, the southern, redneck accent of the voice that recites the text, evokes memories of the slavery in the southern states of America.

It seems justified to say that Public Enemy deals with the violence in the black ghettos from a white racist point of view, in order to touch on the black awareness of Afro-Americans. In fact, the central thought seems to be: stop the violence, because white people are smiling while we kill each other off.

The members of Public Enemy do not occupy themselves with inside descriptions of gang activities. They leave this topic to gangster rappers such as Ice Cube and NWA. Yet, references to gang violence can be found in some of the rap group's lyrics. In the rapsong 'Burn Hollywood Burn' Chuck D. describes the lack of full-fledged representation of Afro-Americans in the film industry, but also the gang violence (which is exceptionally intense in Los Angeles) is briefly discussed:

Get me the hell away from this TV
All this news and views are beneath me
So all I hear about
Is shots ringing out
About gangs puttin' each other's heads out
(Public Enemy; Burn Hollywood Burn)

Although the gang violence comes up for discussion only obliquely in the rap lyrics of Public Enemy, it is important to discuss the gang violence in the Los Angeles region. After all, this is part of what Public Enemy's rapper Flavor Flav calls self-destruction.

In the poor neighborhoods of Los Angeles, youth gangs control the streets. In the book Do or Die, the writer Léon Bing describes her contacts with gang members in South Central ⁴⁵. According to Bing, there are 90 thousand gang members in the Los Angeles region ⁴⁶. The average life expectancy of these gang members, who are for the largest part of Afro-American descent, amounts to 19 years. The gangs, of which the Crips and the Bloods are the biggest and the most notorious ⁴⁷, wage war against each other in order to defend or enlarge their territory. The wars for territory are a direct result of the drugs that control the black neighborhoods. The gang members are simultaneously suppliers and users of drugs, mostly crack. The size of their territory settles their area of distribution and thereby their revenues. With violence, gangs prevent their market from being taken over by others. Violence used by youth gangs is not a new phenomenon. In the fifties and sixties, when membership of a gang was extremely popular, confrontations were accompanied with violence. Yet, the measure of violence was considerably less in those days. The extreme quantity of violence used by the 'modern' youth gangs ⁴⁸ can be explained with the help of two factors. In the first place, it is not difficult to obtain fire-arms. Whereas gangs used to go at each other with chains and knives in earlier times, nowadays they make use of (semi) automatic weapons such as the Uzi and the AR

45 South Central is a town district of Los Angeles.

46 According to other sources, this number amounts to 70 thousand. The difference can be explained by looking at the fact that Bing operates from the point of view of the gangs. The number 70 thousand on the other hand, comes from governmental sources.

47 The Crips and the Bloods can be recognized by the color of their clothes. The Crips wear blue and the Bloods red. Next to this, they make use of complicated gestures to identify themselves.

48 In 1987, 387 murders were committed that were in one way or another connected to Los Angeles youth gangs. In January and February of 1988, this number amounted to 68.

15, which can be bought in arms shops ⁴⁹. Secondly, the sense of self-esteem (or rather the lack of this) plays a part in the gang violence. Afro-American youths feel that they have nothing to lose, except the respect of the gang. Léon Bing's words illustrate this:

Zwarten voelen zich onbelangrijk en niet welkom in dit land. Meer dan eens heb ik van zwarte jongeren gehoord dat, als ze bijvoorbeeld over een parkeerterrein lopen, de sloten van auto's onmiddellijk dichtklikken. Dat maakt die kinderen kwaad en geeft hen de legitimatie anderen en elkaar af te schieten. Want ze weten dat ze niets waard zijn. Met dat gevoel groeien ze op.
(Volkskrant ?/?/91)

The young people who are gang members have usually been born and raised in the poorest ghettos. The ghetto life has made them immune for fear and in many cases completely indifferent. Human life has lost its value for them ⁵⁰.

The fragment from Do or Die can be related to the philosophy of Public Enemy. Though the members of the rap group do not directly deal with gang violence in their raps, indirectly they try to reach the black youths, of whom a considerable number has gang membership. As has become clear above, the lack of self-esteem plays a part in the gang violence. Public Enemy tries to give black youths a sense of self-respect. Among other things, they try to achieve this by referring to the myth of the inferiority of Afro-Americans. They ventilate the idea that the whites have imposed the feeling of inferiority upon the black people. This message is meant for all Afro-Americans, yet it seems to be specifically aimed at the attitude of young blacks, who occupy themselves with destructive things as a result of the hopelessness of ghetto life. An excerpt from

49 Lately, the American government put a ban on the sale of fully automatic guns, despite protests of the National Rifle Association.

50 The youth gangs in Los Angeles have been strikingly described in Dennis Hopper's Colors (1986) and John Singleton's Boyz N The Hood (1991). Especially Boyz N The Hood, with rapper Ice Cube in one of the leading parts, presents a realistic picture of the gang violence from a black point of view.

'Pollywanacracka' illustrates this:

No man is God
And God put us all here
But this system has no wisdom
The devil split us in pairs
And taught us White is Good Black is Bad
(Public Enemy; Pollywanacracka)

In this fragment, Chuck D. says that white America has thrust a feeling of inferiority upon the black Americans. Proof for this can be found in the words 'The devil split us in pairs'⁵¹. With this line, Public Enemy metaphorically gives express that the whites are responsible for a segregation in American society, in which whites occupy a superiority position and blacks are only second rate civilians. Although segregatory legislation is officially abolished, because of the poverty of a relatively extensive section of the Afro-American population a socio-economic segregation has come into existence. The socio-economic segregation is responsible for the fact that the black underclass in America's inner cities becomes more and more isolated.

The Unpropertiedness of Black America

In their rapsongs, the members of Public Enemy hardly ever deal specifically with poverty, joblessness, housing problems and the inferior quality of the educational system in the inner cities of America. Their primary goal is to create a black awareness among the Afro-American population. Hereby, the rap group depicts the limitations that are imposed on black Americans in general terms. This makes it almost impossible to discuss issues such as poverty, joblessness, housing problems and poor education on the basis of Public Enemy's rap lyrics. Still, in my opinion these issues need to be dealt with, because they illuminate the black condition. ing aan de orde komen, omdat zij van belang zijn voor 'uplifting the black race'.

⁵¹ Radical Afro-Americans often refer to whites as devils. Hereby, they base themselves on a theory of the Black Muslim Movement. This theory will be discussed in chapter 3.

We been livin' here
Livin' ain't the word
I been givin'
Haven't got
Classify us in the have-nots
(Public Enemy; Can't Truss It)

The keyword in this fragment is have-nots. In general terms, Chuck D. says here that the Afro-Americans are unpropertied. Just how true this statement is will become clear in the discussion of the issues below.

The Educational System

Get an education which will make our people produce jobs for self and will make our people willing and able to go and do for self. Is not this the goal en aim of the many foreign students who are studying in this country?

- Elijah Muhammad

The educational system in the United States is bipartite. One sector of the educational system is accounted for by the public schools. the other sector is made up by the private schools. The costs for receiving education in the private sector are high. For children in the poor black neighborhoods of the inner cities, attending a school in the private sector is impossible. Therefore, they have to be content with an education in the public sector.

The education in the public sector largely leans on funds of the American government. Due to the governmental focus on foreign affairs, domestic issues have been severely neglected. Among other things, the public schools have suffered for this. The quality of the education on public schools is poor, due to the lack of money. From sheer necessity, classes are big and a large number of teachers are not qualified to teach ⁵².

52 In 1985, the Board of Education dropped the requirements which teachers have to conform to in order to employ liberal

Nowadays, it has almost become standard that public schools in the inner city areas have to close for some days, because their budget falls short (Volkskrant 23/11/91). This indicates that the educational system in the American inner cities is in a critical situation and is hardly up to the task of educating the youth.

The poor quality of the education in the public sector appears from research which used to make up the book Life in Black America. In one of these enquiries, the educational background of Afro-Americans was related to their employment. The occupations were categorised in three sectors: a) upper stratum primary sector, among others engineers, managers and teachers fall under this head; b) lower stratum primary sector, to which among others clerical jobs, craft jobs and sales jobs belong; and c) secondary sector, in which unskilled labor, operative jobs and service jobs are classed. If we take into account the composition of the school on which Afro-Americans received their education (varying from all black to all white except respondent) and remember that many of the all black schools are part of the public sector, the poor quality of the education in the public schools is illustrated. 51.8 % of the Afro-American respondents who received their education at an all black school, hold a job in the least valued secondary sector. For schools that are attended only by white children (except for the Afro-American respondent) this percentage amounts to 21.1 % (Jackson 1991: 138).

The neglect of the educational system by the Republican administrations of Reagan and Bush evoked a storm of criticism. Yet, the American government does not seem to respond to this criticism. The remark 'there is no need for money, there is a need for more discipline in the schools', made by president Reagan in one of his speeches, still seems to be in force (School juni 1988).

The short-comings of the American educational system have considerable consequences for the Afro-American youth. From

art students. In 1988, five thousand liberal art students worked as a teacher on the public schools in New York City (van der Stap 1989: 14)

research in 1987, it is apparent that 50 % of black adolescents leave high school without a diploma. On the cover of 'Apocalypse 91: The Enemy Strikes Black', Public Enemy's rapper Chuck D. discerns the importance of high quality education when he says:

To all the rappers to be:

First of all finish school. Rappers mostly rap about what they know about and if the knowledge is limited the rap will eventually be.

Public Enemy's criticism of the educational system in the United States focuses on the content of the curricula. According to Public Enemy, in the curricula Afro-American history is not taken into account. The history books completely direct attention to white America. The members of Public Enemy believe that this is one of the reasons why many black Americans lack race awareness. Because of the fact that they do not know the history of black America, they do not have a black identity. Chuck D. thinks that this problem can be resolved by establishing schools that are based on the ideology of the Nation of Islam. Meanwhile, the members of the rap group try to make Afro-American youths aware of the history of the black race:

To the brothers in the streets
Schools and the prisons
History shouldn't be a mystery
Our stories real history
Not his story
(Public Enemy; Brothers Gonna Work It Out)

Chuck D. throws light upon the importance of being familiar with black history with the words:

We don't feel good about ourselves. So we hold on to something that's not real or not beneficial. Because if we knew ourselves we'd feel good about ourselves, and we wouldn't use drugs.
(Nation Conscious Rap 1991: 331)

Public Enemy member Sister Souljah adds to this:

I think the purpose of any educational system in any country is to uphold and maintain the power of the state. Because we are in America and the state is racist, white and capitalist, the educational system is a racist, white, capitalist educational system. As a result it is useless to black children, and I mean that. The only reason that I would encourage black children to go to school is in the absence of us as black people creating alternatives for them.

(Nation Conscious Rap 1991: 253)

In the education that is pursued by Public Enemy, the pain given to the Afro-Americans by white America is concentrated on. The black woman plays an important part in this. Public Enemy seems to focus on the black woman in order to command respect for her:

They disrespected mamma and treated her like dirt
America took her reshaped her, raped her
Nope, it never made the paper
Beat us, mated us
Made us attack our woman in black

But why is it that we're many different shades
Black woman's privacy invaded years and years
It's not the past's but the future's
What she fears
Strong we be strong
The next generation
It's not who we are facin'
The fingers pointed to us in our direction
The blind state of mind needs correction
Word to the mother tighten connection
To be a man you need no election
This generation generates a new attitude
Sista to you we should not be rude
(Public Enemy; Revolutionary Revolution)

In the first part of this fragment, Public Enemy narrates the story of the brutal manner in which the black woman was treated in the slavery period. The rap group finds evidence for the rap

of the black woman in the different colors of skins within the Afro-American community. In the last part of this excerpt, Public Enemy calls on the black man not to treat the black woman the way the whites did in the past. Next to this, Public Enemy believes it is necessary to tell about the manner in which Afro-Americans ended up in the United States. The abduction from Africa and the conditions on a slave ship are central in the rapsong 'Can't Truss It':

I know
Where I'm from, not dum diddie dum
From the base motherland
The place of the drum
Invaded by the wack diddie wack
Fooled the black, left us faded
.....
An I judge everyone, one by the one
Look here come the judge
Watch here he come now
I can only guess what's happenin'
Years ago he woulda been
The ships captain
Gettin' me bruised on a cruise
What I got to lose, lost all contact
Got me layin' on my back
Rollin' in my own leftover
When I roll over, I roll over in somebody else's
90 F..kin' days on a slave ship
(Public Enemy; Can't Truss It)

Except giving a description of the horrors of the slavery, this fragment (also) indicates that the slavery is not forgotten. On the contrary, according to the members of Public Enemy, slavery still exists in America. The comparison between the judge and the captain of a slave ship illustrates this view.

Joblessness

In the discussion of the American educational system, it has become clear that there is a relation between the education in the public sector to which Afro-Americans are condemned and the socio-economic status of the occupation they acquire.

Altogether, 52 % of the working Afro-Americans have found a job in the secondary sector. 13 % of the black males who work in the secondary sector earn their money with unskilled labor. Especially in the heavy industry, from of old an important employer of the Afro-American community, many black males make a living. Consequently, the Afro-American population is exceptionally sensitive to economic recessions. In Life in Black America, the hazardous position of a large number of black employees is assented to:

The proportion of blacks in low status jobs was four times that of whites in 1948, but by 1970 the ratio showed blacks only twice as likely to be in less skilled jobs. However, the rate of progress slowed down considerably in the 1970s. The 1980s brought further evidence of erosion, with black workers particularly vulnerable to postindustrial displacement, economic recession and less aggressive affirmative action policies. (Jackson 1991: 128)

This quotation indicates that the number of black Americans working in the secondary sector increased disproportionately in the 1970s and 1980s as compared with the number of whites. This could be an indication of the degradation of the quality of the education in the public sector, as a consequence of reduced governmental expenditures for the benefit of the educational system.

Joblessness rates are high in the Afro-American community. The Afro-Americans make up about 12 % of the American population. Yet, 20 % of them is officially registered as jobless. For black youths, this percentage amounts to 50 %. The hidden joblessness is not included in this percentage. Thus, it is plausible that the actual number of jobless black Americans is considerably larger. This is pointed out in Life in Black America:

Future research on black joblessness should go beyond official definitions to better clarify the experiences of the hidden unemployed. This phenomenon of hidden unemployment is central to increasing public policy

debates about an emerging underclass in urban America, especially in predominantly black inner city neighborhoods with high structural unemployment. (Jackson 1991: 158)

The national percentage of joblessness amounted to 6 % in 1988. During the last four years this has increased to 7.3 %. The percentage of jobless Afro-Americans amply exceeds this percentage. The fact that 1.6 million jobs have been lost in the heavy industry since 1982, is to a high degree responsible for the large number of unemployed Afro-Americans. In some black neighborhoods of the inner cities, the joblessness percentage comes to 40%.

Public Enemy does not deal directly with the disproportionately high unemployment among Afro-Americans in their rap lyrics. Nevertheless, the attempts of white America to keep black Americans powerless are depicted in general terms. Indirectly, this is related to the possibility to work. After all, because of the fact that a considerable part of the black Americans are in a bad socio-economic position, they are deprived of the possibility of an affluent life. According to the members of Public Enemy, it is obvious that the American government does not want the Afro-American community to benefit from any progress. A fragment from 'By The Time I Get To Arizona' subscribes to this:

He try to keep it yesteryear
The good ol' days
The same ol' ways
That kept us dyin'
(Public Enemy; By The Time I Get To Arizona)

Firstly, Public Enemy seems to refer to the slavery period, in which the black population in the United States had no rights and few material possessions. The lines 'The good ol' days/The same ol' ways/That kept us dyin'' make sense in this context. Next to this, the fragment ventilates the point of view that the slavery system serves as a model for the way in which white America treats Afro-Americans. That is, the line 'He try to keep it yesteryear' expresses the suppression of blacks by whites ('he') as it was present in the slavery period and

(according to the rap band) still exists in American society.

Housing-Shortage

Approximately 34 million Americans live in poverty. Two or three million of them are homeless. For 95 %, this group consists of people of Afro-American or Latino ⁵³ descent (Volkskrant 3/10/87). Between 1985 and 1987, the number of homeless people in New York increased with 25 % to a total of 60 thousand ⁵⁴ (Trouw 14/11/87). Working people who live just above the poverty line and who have become unemployed due to mass discharges, are to a high extent responsible for the growing number of homeless people.

In the early eighties, there were a large number of slum houses. This 'stability' decreased in later years. Due to the legal rent maxima and the inflation, letting houses has become less remunerative. Landlords cannot demand enough rent to maintain the houses. As a result, houses become unfit for habitation in course of time. Especially people in black neighborhoods fall victim to this process. By the side of this, many low rent houses are lost for poor Afro-Americans because of renovation projects. Renovations automatically effectuate that houses become unpayable for blacks, because costs for renovation are passed on the rent. The fact that the national budget for subsidized housing was reduced by the Reagan Administration from 32 billion dollars in 1981 to 8 billion dollars in 1987 also plays a part in the growing homelessness in the inner city areas (Trouw 14/11/87). Poor Afro-Americans are forced to stay in the pauperized ghettos, or have to resort to homelessness, because they cannot obtain housing outside the black ghettos. In many cases, landlords refuse to let houses outside the ghetto to blacks, because they fear that houses are going to depreciate due to the arrival of Afro-Americans. Related to this is the phenomenon that is referred to as 'white flight'. This implies that white people move en masse as soon as a certain number of black people have settled in the

53 I use the term Latino to denote Spanish speaking people of Caribbean, Mexican or South or Central American descent. These groups are often referred to with the term Hispanics as well.

54 More than half of them are families with children.

neighborhood. Public Enemy refers to the 'white flight' phenomenon in the rapsong 'Move':

Jack movin' out
'Cause black movin' in
(Public Enemy; Move!)

On 'Apocalypse 91: The Enemy Strikes Black', Chuck D. comments on the living conditions in the black ghettos:

And how could you love livin' in the projects
Gittin' checks an givin' it back to the government
Bust yo ass to pay the rent
And let's look at that word project
Another word for experiment
One side of the street is a church
Across the boroughs is a liquor store
Both of them keepin' us poor
Keepin' us down
My hood ain't considered a town
(Public Enemy; Move!)

It is apparent from this excerpt that Public Enemy considers the black ghettos to be part of the white conspiracy that is aimed at the oppression of the Afro-American community. A central place in this is occupied by the socio-economic segregation of black Americans, to which Chuck D. refers by comparing the ghettos with an experiment of the American government. In this picture, the liquor stores are an important tool to prevent the black community from improving their living conditions. It seems curious that Public Enemy regards the Church as a tool of oppression as well. After all, in many instances the Church is a charitable institution. Yet, Public Enemy speaks here of the Church based on Christianity. Because of the fact that the Christian faith is a white religion, the Christian Church can never positively influence the black community. That is, the Church is based on the white Christian faith and therefore, it self-evidently is a tool to indoctrinate the black population with white ideologies and trick them out of their money.

Criminality

In the penitentiaries of the United States, more than one million people are detained. With this, the United States occupy the first place on the world list of the highest number of prisoners ⁵⁵. Moreover, the National Institute of Justice has calculated that the prison population increases with 13 % per year. In order to illustrate this increase, in 1983 the county jails were occupied for 85 %. In 1989, there was an overpopulation that amounted to 8 %. These statistics are relevant here, because Afro-Americans are especially likely to end up in jail ⁵⁶. One out of every four black Americans between 20 and 29 years old is detained, or released on either bail or parole ⁵⁷. Public Enemy does certainly not exaggerate when Chuck D. says:

And the joints
Packed
Back to back with blacks
Poor brothers doin' a bid
Who did somethin' but did not think
(Public Enemy; Move!)

Public Enemy does not make mention of it here, but the criminality of Afro-Americans to a large extent revolves around drugs. Since 1980, the number of black Americans who are arrested for drug crimes has increased at a higher speed than the number of arrest for the American population as a whole. Nationally, the percentage of black prisoners has grown from 30 % to 38 % between 1984 and 1988.

The increase in the number of arrested and convicted black Americans can be explained by taking the living conditions in

⁵⁵ For every 100 thousand inhabitants, 426 people are detained. The volume of this number becomes clear when it is compared to South Africa. In South Africa, this number comes to 33 people per 100 thousand.

⁵⁶ The chance for Afro-Americans to be sent to prison is four times as big as for black South Africans.

⁵⁷ Altogether, the number of blacks between 20 and 29 years old who come into collision with the law amounted to 606,690 in 1991. This number is higher than the number of Afro-Americans of all ages who receive a higher education (436 thousand).

the inner city areas into account. The hopelessness of life in the ghettos and the dawn of crack cocaine have resulted in the growth of drug use and drug criminality. The hard approach of the drug problem has led up to more severe penalties for both dealers and users. The hard approach is characterised by the thought that every soft-drug user is a potential hard-drug user and that every hard-drug user essentially is a criminal. Therefore, drug users are put to the choice: kick their habit voluntarily or be sent to prison. As a consequence of the drug fighters' concentration on users, black drug addicts end up in prisons in growing numbers⁵⁸. By considering drug use to be a crime, the American judicial system gets strong racist overtones. After all, many of the black Americans in the inner cities are addicted.

Racism

The systematic oppression of minority groups is illegal in the United States. In the 1950s and 1960s, the Civil Rights Movement has brought about an official racial equality. Yet, the larger part of the Afro-American population is convinced that white America does everything to oppress them. In their opinion, the situation in which a disproportionately number of the black find themselves is brought about by the racist attitude of white people. Black and white people agree that racism is common in American society. 92 % of the blacks and 87 % of the whites think that racist prejudices are the order of the day. 90 % of the black Americans think that the government should take more action to improve their living conditions. 54 % of the Afro-Americans intimate that they have been insulted because of the color of their skin. At the side of this, 24 % of the black Americans hint that they have been physically threatened because of their color. Volkskrant 28/1/87).

As we have seen, Public Enemy deals with important social issues such as drugs, black on black violence, criminal behavior and the shortcomings of the educational system. These problems are consequences of covert racism from the side of the government. At the side of this, in the context of Public

58 85 % of the people in state penitentiaries and county jails arrived here because of drug criminality or drug use.

Enemy's racial awareness, it is self-evident that the rap group also concentrates on the overt racism in American society. In the section of overt racism below, I will limit myself to the discussion of interracial relationships, police brutality and violence of white civilians against Afro-Americans.

Man you ain't gotta worry
Worry 'bout a thing
'Bout your daughter
Nah she ain't my type
(But supposin' she said she loved me)
Are you afraid of the mix of Black and White
We're livin' in a land where
The law say the mixing of race
Makes the blood impure
She's a woman I'm a man
But by the look on your face
See ya can't stand it

Man calm your ass down, don't get mad
I don't need ya sista
(But supposin' she said she loved me)
Would you still love her
Or would you dismiss her
What is pure? Who is pure?
Is it European state of mind I'm not sure
If the whole world was to come
Thru peace and love
Then what would we be made of?
(Public Enemy; Fear Of A Black Planet)

In the rapsong 'Fear Of A Black Planet', Public Enemy focuses on the white man. Public Enemy criticises white America for their fear of interracial relationships. In this fragment, the members of the rap group ground themselves on the ideology of the Ku Klux Klan. The Ku Klux Klan strongly disapproves of racial mixture. Officially, people of all races are equal. Yet, the mentality of the period before the Civil Rights Movement seems to be very persistent. That is, the idea that Afro-Americans are inferior is not completely banned from American society. Public Enemy ascribes the fear of whites for racial mixture to this inferiority myth, and the rap group reflects

the words of the black leader Malcolm X:

... your thirst for integrating makes the white man think
you want only to marry his daughter.

(White 1990: 152)

The phrases 'We're livin' in a land where/The law say the
mixing of race/Makes the blood impure' do not seem to be
justified. After all, above it has been made clear that racism
is officially banned. The members of Public Enemy however,
believe that the racist ideology of the Ku Klux Klan is shared
by people in the American government. A fragment from the
rap song 'Rebirth' illustrates Public Enemy's suspicion:

These days
You can't see who's in cahoots
Cause now the KKK
Wears three-piece suits
(Public Enemy; Rebirth)

One branch of the government is regularly accused of racism by
Public Enemy: the police.

Sirens in the air
Ahhh sh-t
So I'm outta here
But the blue in the front
Called the blue in the back
They cut me off
Stopped me dead in my tracks
But this is minimal
I'm not a criminal
I always did what I did
Because I'm not a kid
But they looked me down
They stared me down
Told me what I did
I ain't wit' it
'Cause word around was a stick up
Yeah, yeah, yeah
B-boy niga in a pick up
(Public Enemy; Get The F--- Outta Dodge)

Public Enemy believes that the aggressive actions of the police against Afro-Americans are the result of a racist attitude. In their opinion, the color of skin is too often used as a standard on the basis of which people are arrested. The problems of drugs, violence and criminality in America's inner cities is partially responsible for the racist attitude of the police. That is, because of the fact that black Americans who live in the urban areas are often involved in drug use, drug criminality and violence, it has become fashionable to randomly associate these problems with black. To say it in the words of Public Enemy: 'Cause word around was a stick up ... B-boy niga in a pick up'.

The use of excessive violence by the police could play a part in the fact that 30 % of the Afro-Americans do not dare to go into a white neighborhood after dark. An indication for this can be found in the following. In 1986, a New Orleans sheriff said at a press conference: 'Als er 's avonds laat zwarten door een blanke buurt rijden, dan houden wij die auto aan, want als je in een blanke buurt woont en er rijdt een auto achter je aan met twee zwarten erin, dan is de kans groot dat ze iets van plan zijn' (Vrij Nederland 31/1/87).

In the eighties, several incidents, in which Afro-Americans became the victim of racist violence of white civilians, took place in the United States. Some of these incidents are worked into the rap lyrics of Public Enemy. Probably the fact that Public Enemy primarily focuses on a black audience is responsible for the fact that these incidents are only mentioned and not elaborated upon. The larger part of the Afro-American population knows what Public Enemy is talking about when Virginia Beach and Bensonhurst are mentioned. Van der Stap subscribes to this when she writes in Go Gerdy:

De zwarte kranten hebben de afgelopen dagen vol gestaan met berichten over de dood van een zeventienjarige zwarte jongen op Staten Island. Hij liep met een stel vrienden door een blanke arbeiderswijk. Een aantal blanke mannen voor een café maakte racistische opmerkingen. De jongen was op hen afgelopen en had gezegd: 'I don't want any trouble'. De mannen gingen door met treiteren en de zwarte jongens vluchtten weg. Opgejaagd door een aantal

van de mannen rende de jongen de snelweg op, waar hij werd aangereden door een vrachtwagen. De kranten noemen het 'een tweede Howard Beach'.

(van der Stap 1990: 116)

For other listeners of Public Enemy's music however, these names may be unknown. Therefore, it is meaningful to briefly supply these incidents with a context.

Nothing's worse than a mother's pain
Of a son slain in Bensonhurst
Can't wait for the state to decide the fate
So this jam I dedicate
Places with racist faces
Just an example of many cases
The Greek weekend speech I speak
From a lesson learned in Virginia Beach
(Public Enemy; Welcome To The Terrordome)

In 'Welcome To The Terrordome', two incidents that have strong racist overtones are discussed. The Bensonhurst incident took place in the New York district Bensonhurst in 1989. During the election campagne for the mayoralty, racial tensions violently surfaced. Yusuf Hawkins, a young black American, was attacked and killed by a group of white youths. The Virginia Beach incident can be compared with the, by the media circumstantially illustrated, murder of a black youth in the white working-class neighborhood Howard Beach. In both instances, a group of whites threatened some Afro-Americans. When the latter tried to escape they were pursued by the white mob. In both cases, one of the black Americans was killed when he was hit by a car. As was said earlier on, bringing up the names of Bensonhurst and Virginia Beach is sufficient to remind the Afro-American community of white racism. In other words, Public Enemy makes use of incidents in which blacks were killed by racist violence in order to tell the blacks that lynchings are not a phenomenon of the past.

Chapter 3 - Black Politics

Black Political Power Within the America Establishment

I'm on the one mission
To get a politician
To honor or he's a goner
- Chuck D.

In the first part of this chapter, I will deal with the representation of black Americans in the political establishment. Hereby, I will direct my attention to politics on the municipal level. After all, nearly 90 % of the black underclass can be found in the large cities in the United States. Of the Afro-Americans who have obtained a place in municipal politics, will be expected that they leave no stone unturned to fight the life-sized socio-economic problems which the black underclass has to contend with.

In the 1960s, the protest actions of the Civil Rights Movement have brought about unity in the Afro-American community. Next to this, the racial awareness of the black Americans was activated. In the struggle for equality on the economic and political level, considerable results have been produced. The activities, successes and failures of the Civil Rights Movements are minutely described in Parting the Waters.

The violence that raised its head in the second half of the sixties, for the larger part undid the consensus among Afro-Americans. Especially young blacks wanted to acquire their rights with violence. Therefore, they joined hands with radical black leaders. They also no longer appreciated the support of white liberals. As a result of this, the Civil Rights Movement lost its momentum and became less visible in the seventies.

Once it was activated however, the black awareness has not suffered by the decreasing influence of the Civil Rights Movement. The awareness entailed a political mobilization, which enabled growing numbers of Afro-Americans to take a place in municipal politics and municipal organisations. The disproportionately poor representation of Afro-Americans in municipal politics was in some degrees set right by this

process. In the 1980s, this increase has stagnated ⁵⁹.

The seventies and eighties have shown that black Americans can see their group of population represented in municipal organisations. In itself, this is not a new phenomenon. In cities with an abolitionist background, Afro-Americans have been represented for many decades. Boston is an example of this. Yet, in those days the extent to which they were represented was much more disproportionate than nowadays. The presence of black Americans in municipal organisations does not automatically mean that the Afro-American population is taken into account. There are several forces at work that oppose the transformation of black political representation into improvement of black America's living conditions. The unwillingness to take action for the blacks is one of these forces. In some cities, the power of the political electorate is limited by the so-called political machines. Especially in the cities in the northern states, which were industrialized at the end of the nineteenth century, the Democratic political machines have much power. Nimbly, they make use of the tendency of the Afro-American community to vote for the Democratic party. Black Americans who are part of the political machine are used to appeal on the black electorate. When the political machines have succeeded, among others with the help of the black voters, in getting their candidate at the office of mayor, the problems of the poor Afro-Americans are often ignored. Thus, it is not unusual that the black electorate in the cities is allured to vote for the Democratic candidate with false promises. A prospect of improvement of their position is held out to them. Yet, subsequently promises are only partially or not at all kept ⁶⁰.

In order to really exercise an influence on the course of things, representation in municipal organisations does not

59 See Racial Politics in American Cities for a detailed analysis of black politics. Moreover, White's Black Leadership in America provides an overview of black political movements.

60 Jane Byrne, who was elected mayor of Chicago in 1979, provides a good illustration for this. She did not cooperate with the Democratic political machine and promised the black population to pay attention to their problems if they would support her. After she had won the mayoralty, she kept none of her promises.

suffice. The Afro-American community needs a black mayor in order to bring about changes in their living conditions. To succeed in getting a black American in the highest municipal post, a number of conditions must be fulfilled. In the first place, a leader with a strong personality must step forward from the black community. If the black electorate has the suspicion that a black candidate for the mayoralty is not going to pull through, they prefer to vote for a white candidate. In this second place, the black community has to have the support of other groups of population, such as liberal whites and minority groups. The Afro-Americans are the largest minority group in the United States. Yet, they are not able to account for a majority in any of the large cities. In other words, the black electorate is too small to independently elect a black mayor. By forming a coalition with liberal whites and/or Latinos, the Afro-Americans have been able in getting a member of their own group of population in the office of mayor in a number of large cities. The Jewish population in the United States has proven to be an important ally in this. Many of the American Jews are liberally oriented. As a result, they can identify with the point of view of black Americans. Because of their support, the black electorate was able to appoint a black mayor in Los Angeles ⁶¹ and New York ⁶². In both cities, liberal whites supported the black candidate due to unease about the conservatives who were in power. The fact that the Afro-Americans need the generally liberal Jewish community to be secured of political representation, is illustrated by the fact that Tom Bradley lost much of his support in municipal elections in 1987 because of his contacts with the black leader Louis Farrakhan. In the opinion of his Jewish following, mayor Bradley had insufficiently disassociated himself from Farrakhan, who is reproached with anti-semitic views. As a result of this, Bradley lost the support of a part of the Jewish electorate.

61 In this city, an electoral coalition of Afro-Americans and white liberals (who were aimed at reform) was responsible for the election of Tom Bradley to the office of mayor in 1973. Thereupon, Tom Bradley was re-elected mayor four times.

62 The term of office of white mayor Ed Koch was followed by the election of the Afro-American David Dinkins. Dinkins became mayor when blacks and liberal white voters united against Koch's conservative policy.

The awakening of the black consciousness has led to the fact that, from none in 1960, the number of black mayors of cities with a population of over 50 thousand amounted to 27 in 1985. Among these cities were some of the largest in the United States: Los Angeles, Chicago, Philadelphia en Atlanta. In 1989, America's largest city joined these when Dinkins was elected mayor of New York.

Has the appointment of black mayors in a number of large cities resulted in concrete improvements for the Afro-American population. Paradoxically, the answer to this question is yes and no. On the one hand, the increase of the number of Afro-American mayors has brought about changes from which the black community has benefited. Firstly, a growing number of black Americans have joined the police force. As a result, the representation of blacks in the police force has become less disproportionate. Moreover, this has contributed to the decrease of the use of excessive force of the police against America's largest minority group. Secondly, the municipal government has stimulated the black business community under the influence of black mayors. Thirdly, the number of black employees in the public sector has grown. Above all in the social care sector and the technical sector, jobs have been created for black Americans. Lastly, due to the power of black mayors, Afro-Americans have in growing numbers filled plaiids in municipal organisations and committees. By means of these, the interests of black Americans can be better taken into account.

Undoubtedly, these are favorable developments which may lead to the improvement of the position of the Afro-American community. Yet, there is one factor that justifies the opinion that the political power of black Americans has hardly resulted in concrete changes. Namely, the improvements described above are primarily beneficial for the black middle class. They have, due to among other things their contacts with the white business community, profited by the attention on the black population. Next to this, the black middle class has by means of their good organisation brought about that the black political agenda tends to concentrate on the development abilities and upward mobility of the individual rather than social objectives such as redistribution of money and power for the benefit of poor

Afro-Americans.

People in the black middle class have strengthened their position. Yet, poor Afro-Americans have hardly, or not at all benefited. Life-size problems such as unemployment, low quality education, housing problems and violence remain a continuous threat to the black underclass in the inner cities. Otherwise, the undiminished existence of these problems cannot be completely unloaded on the fixation on the black middle class. As a result of the Republican Administrations of Reagan and Bush, large cities have to contend with a lack of funds. Black mayors are more often than not in no position to tackle the problems of the poor blacks in their cities.

A gap in the black community in the United States has come into existence. Partially, the Afro-Americans have worked themselves up into the middle class, or have reinforced their middle class position. Yet, the black underclass has stayed behind in the hopelessness of the inner cities and becomes more and more isolated. This is tragic. Especially for the people in the worst socio-economic position, the increased political power of the Afro-Americans has not brought improvements.

The members of Public Enemy are aware of the fact that black politicians hold not enough power to change the conditions of the black underclass. Chuck D. refers to this in one of his university speeches:

... when a black man is mayor of a city, he's not really a black mayor. He can't be. Cause all the other communities that are tight are going to put pressure on that black mayor to be mayor of the city. I don't care if blacks are the majority in the city, other communities will make sure that this person does what they want him to do. Just like in New York. Dinkins is in a lot of heat from all the other communities, and getting heat from the black community. Being a mayor of a city can mean but so much. What we need is more leaders in our community and less people with titles.

(Nation Conscious Rap 1991: 366-367)

In this excerpt, Chuck D. says that the coalition of Afro-Americans and other groups leads up to a situation in which a

black mayor is unable to do enough for the black population, because he has to pay sufficient attention to the other coalition groups. In his speech, Chuck D. mentions the situation in New York, however without elaborating on it. I think that the situation in New York is characteristic for black politics. Therefore, I will briefly concentrate on it. As was mentioned earlier on, the Afro-American David Dinkins was elected mayor of New York in 1989. This was possible only, because the black New Yorkers joined hands with among others the Jewish community. In 1991, both the Afro-Americans and the Jews put pressure on Dinkins. The direct motive for the conflict between blacks and Jews was the death of an Afro-American boy, who was killed by a Jewish driver and the subsequent murder of a Jewish student ⁶³. The actual reason for the conflict however, lies deeper. That is, the Afro-American New Yorkers, who had counted on Dinkins for improving the living conditions in the black ghettos, think that the mayor subordinate them to the Jews. They feel betrayed by Dinkins, whom they believe to pay more attention to the Jewish community than to his own people.

In his speech, Chuck D. does not express an exceptionally radical point of view concerning black mayors. In the rap lyrics of Public Enemy however, he is less forbearing. The black politicians who operate within the political establishment are referred to with the term Uncle Tom in rap lyrics. This extremely negative denomination is used by Public Enemy for Afro-Americans who do not act as black. The term Uncle Tom signifies the tranquil, reconcilatory black American who cooperates with white people. In the rapsong 'Nighthtrain', Public Enemy deals with the treason in their own ranks. Public Enemy could be discussing the neglect of the black community by black politicians in this fragment. The fragment could even have a specific bearing on mayor Dinkins. The lines 'Wit' some of them lookin'/Just like you' offer a possible indication for this. During the conflict between Jews and Afro-Americans, Dinkins wore a baseball cap with an 'X' on it, when he visited the black neighborhood to calm the population. The 'X' became

63 The Jewish student was stabbed to death by black youths as retaliation. The rumor has spread that paramedics had rendered aid to the Jewish passengers of the car that was involved in the accident, but had left two severely injured children to their fate.

known through Malcolm X, a radical black leader of the 1960s. by the lines 'Wit' some of them lookin'/Just like you' Public Enemy could possibly imply that Dinkins is just a puppet of white supremacy, although he is wearing the symbol of radical black awareness:

You mustn't just put your
Trust in every brother yo
Some don't give a damn
Cause they the other man
Worse than a bomb
Posin' as Uncle Toms
Disgracin' the race
Blowin' up
The whole crew
Wit' some of them lookin'
Just like you
(Public Enemy; Nighttrain)

Public Enemy's Support of Radical Black Leaders

In the first part of this chapter, it has become clear that Public Enemy regards black politicians who have been absorbed by the white establishment as traitors of the black cause. In fact, they have not derived their message from these Afro-Americans. The members of Public Enemy rather ground themselves on the ideologies of radical black leaders who operate outside the political establishment. Chuck D.'s words 'What we need is more leaders in our community and less people with titles' indicates that Public Enemy bend their thoughts towards leaders who have not been coopted by the white establishment. Political activism on the neighborhood level (the so-called grass roots activism) is namely regarded as the field in which concrete changes can be brought about by the rap group. This point is supported in Life in Black America:

As we approach the 21st century, active participation in neighborhood organizations may well become a major weapon in the escalating struggle against crime, drugs and other problems that seriously threaten the quality of life in black communities.
(Jackson 1991: 31)

There are several black movements, on which the members of the rap group base their ideas. These movements will be discussed below.

The first movement, which influenced the members of Public Enemy and whereof ideas can be found in the rap lyrics of the group, is the Black Panther Party. This black movement came into existence in the 1960s when many blacks turned away from religion, because of the controversy around Black Muslim leader Elijah Muhammad ⁶⁴. According to the Black Panthers, they did not fight a racial, but a class struggle. Still, their radical ideas are race restricted. A violent manner of acquiring equality for the Afro-American community and fighting racism is not precluded by the Black Panther Party. The militant ideology of the Black Panthers recurs in Public Enemy; not only in their rap lyrics, but in their attitude as well. On 'Fear Of A Black Planet', a fragment can be heard, in which people give their comment on the rap group's appearance:

... I thought it was on the most appalling things I've ever seen. There were two gentlemen in cages on either side of the stage with fake Uzis.

(Public Enemy; Incident At 6.66 FM)

In this excerpt, the security organisation of Public Enemy is described: the Security of the First World. Public Enemy member Flavor Flav comments on the display of fire-arms at concerts:

Now we are gettin' to be in position where we ain't takin' no shorts. That's why the S1W's hold Uzi's on stage. That doesn't represent violence, that represents why we are in the position we are in today.

(Nation Conscious Rap 1991: 319)

Here, Flavor Flav refers to the ability to defend themselves, which was brought about by the black consciousness. If this defensibility, which is symbolized in the Uzis, would have been

⁶⁴ Elijah Muhammad was suspected of giving the order to assassinate the black leader Malcolm X. Initially, Malcolm X was a follower of Muhammad. Yet, after some years he became his opponent.

present in the slavery period, the Afro-Americans would never have come to the United States. It was mentioned above that the Black Panther Party-based defensibility is also expressed in Public Enemy's rap lyrics. In 'Fight The Power', which is a censored version of NWA's 'Fuck The Police'⁶⁵ according to Chuck D., this is illustrated:

Don't worry be happy
Was a number one jam
Damn if I say you can slap me right here
(get it) let's get this party started right
(Public Enemy; Fight The Power)

A direct reference to the Black Panther Party can be found in the rap 'Party For Your Right To Fight'⁶⁶, in which the leading persons of the movement Bobby Seale, Eldridge Cleaver and Huey Newton are mentioned:

This party⁶⁷ started right in '66
With a pro-black radical mix
then at the hour of twelve
Some force cut the power
And emerged from hell
It was your so-called government
That made this occur
Like the grafted devils they were
J. Edgar Hoover⁶⁸ and he coulda proved to ya
He had King⁶⁹ and X⁷⁰ set up
Also the party with Newton, Cleaver and Seale

65 'And I told the brother that I didn't think the record of the year [1989] was 'Fight The Power', but it started with the same letters; F.T.P., 'Fuck The Police', by NWA. I said 'Fight The Power' was the censored version, the version you hear on the radio' (Nation Conscious Rap 1991: 365).

66 'Party For Your Right To Fight' seems to be a twisting of the title of the Beastie Boys raphit 'Fight For Your Right To Party'.

67 Black Panther Party

68 J. Edgar Hoover was head of the FBI in the sixties.

69 Martin Luther King

70 Malcolm X

(Public Enemy; Party For Your Right To Fight)

The second movement that has left its traces in the rap lyrics of Public Enemy is Black Capitalism, a variant of the Black Power Movement. The Black Capitalism Movement is related to the Black Muslim Movement and focuses on acquiring a position of economic power in order to be able to compete with whites. Public Enemy attaches much value to the improvement of the economic position of the Afro-American community. In their raps, the members of the group bring the necessity of establishing a black business community to the attention of young blacks. An important tool in this initiative could be the control over the financial side of rap music. On the cover of 'Apocalypse 91: The Enemy Strikes Black' addresses future rappers with the words:

... getting in the music business is like being on a lay-up line in basketball. It's long, yeah, but depending on your patience and dedication you will eventually get a shot. If you leave the line and quit you will get no shot. Based on how much you've studied and practiced will determine if you make the shot. If you continue to make the shots, eventually you get to play in the game (the music business). There are many books and magazines about the music business: find them, read them, learn them and apply.

In the opinion of Public Enemy, it has to change that only 3 % of the black Americans in the entertainment business have a black accountant or a black lawyer and that rappers gather in only a small percentage of the winnings of their records ⁷¹. Similar to the black radio stations, of which 75 % are controlled by whites, Afro-Americans have to gain control over record companies. At present, black rap artists depend on whites to get airplay:

Do you really think they'll mind
To play the funky jams
That everybody wit'

⁷¹ This percentage amounts to 10 %. If a rapper produced the record, he receives 20 %.

Some Def Jef or Ice T
Show they rollin' wit' the syndicate
Or can dey get funky
Wit' the underground
(Public Enemy; How To Kill A Radio Consultant)

At the side of this, Public Enemy tells black Americans not to invest their money in businesses that are controlled by whites. Money has to stay in the black community in order to prevent capital from being lost. This thought is most clearly expressed in 'Shut Em Down':

I like Nike ⁷² but wait a minute
The neighborhood supports so put some
Money in it
Corporations owe
Dey gotta give up the dough
To da town
Or else
We gotta shut 'em down
(Public Enemy; Shut Em Down)

Public Enemy wants to use the money that stays in the black community for the establishment of a black television station. The offer on the American television is a sensitive subject for the rap group. That is, the members of Public Enemy think that the larger part of what is offered on television has no value for the Afro-American viewers. On the contrary, entertainment programs such as the soap operas depict an image that can have a negative impact on black Americans. In the first place, Public Enemy is convinced that watching the lifestyle that is presented in the soap operas is in the way of the black awareness. That is, black viewers may aspire to adapt to white standards and as a result of this lose their black identity. Secondly, Public Enemy believes that the offer on the television can have a paralyzing effect on the Afro-American population, because it focuses on white America. Seeing the material prosperity of whites may give black Americans a

72 In this fragment, Chuck D. focuses on Nike, because sports shoes and clothes of this brand are very popular among young blacks.

feeling of inferiority. These ideas come to the fore in 'She Watch Channel Zero':

The woman makes the men all pause
And if you got a woman
She might make you forget yours
There's a 5 letter word ⁷³
To describe her character
But her brains being washed by an actor
And every real man that tries to approach
Come the closer he comes
He gets dissed like a roach
I don't think I can handle
She goes from channel to channel

Cold lookin' for that hero
She watch channel zero

2, 7, 5, 4, 8 she watched she said
All added up to zero
And nothing in her head
She turns and turns
And she hopes the soaps
Are for real - she learns
Is that it ain't true, nope
But she won't survive
And rather die and lie
Falls for a fool - for some dude - on a tube

Trouble vision for a sister
Because I know she don't know, I quote
Her brains retrained
By a 24 inch remote
Revolution a solution
For all our children⁷⁴
But all her children
Don't mean as much as the show, I mean
Watch her worship the screen, and fiend

73 This probably refers to the word bitch.

74 This is an allusion to the soap opera 'All My Children'.

For a TV add
And it just makes me mad
(Public Enemy; She Watch Channel Zero)

At present, there is a television station for Afro-Americans, called Black Entertainment Television (BET). BET is controlled by Time/Life magazines. With the help of the black business community, Public Enemy wants to establish a BETI station, Black Entertainment Television (and) Information.

The third movement that has heavily influenced the members of Public Enemy is the Nation of Islam (also known as the Black Muslim Movement). The Nation of Islam is established by Wallace D. Fard in the 1930s. Under the leadership of Elijah Muhammad, the following of the Nation of Islam grows considerably in the 1960s. Especially poor Afro-Americans tend to link up in the movement. After the assassination of Malcolm X however, this enthusiasm fades and the influence of the movement rapidly declines. After the death of Elijah Muhammad in 1975, the leadership of the Nation of Islam comes in the hands of his son, Wallace D. Muhammad. As opposed to his father, Wallace D. Muhammad adopts a conciliatory attitude towards whites. In fact, under his leadership the movement embraces the Pan-Islamic view point of Malcolm X. This means that the Nation of Islam becomes accessible for all people who follow the Islam. In the eighties, minister Louis Farrakhan infuses new life in the Nation of Islam. Farrakhan, who first made a stir in 1981, strives for the Nation of Islam's return to the doctrines of Elijah Muhammad. Racial separatism, self-determination and the establishment of a black state within the borders of the United States are the most important goals of the Nation of Islam under the leadership of Louis Farrakhan. Many rappers, among whom Public Enemy, have linked up with him and disseminate his ideology. On 'Apocalypse 91: The Enemy Strikes Black' Public Enemy urges black Americans to mend their ways and live according to Farrakhan's doctrines:

Farrakhan's a prophet and I think you ought to listen
To what he can say to you, what you ought to do
(Public Enemy; Bring Tha Noiz)

Why are the ideas of the Nation of Islam so important for the

members of Public Enemy and why are they so suitable to be used in rap lyrics? The keyword in the answer to this question is black awareness. The ideology of the Nation of Islam not only makes the Afro-Americans conscious of their color of skin; it also calls attention to black Americans that they are not an inferior, but a superior race:

I'm sayin' things that they say
I'm not supposed to
Give you pride that you may not find
If you're blind about your past
Then I'll point behind
Kings, Queens, warriors, lovers
People proud sisters and brothers
It's the biggest fear-suckers get tears
When we can top their best ideas
(Public Enemy; Rightstarter)

To those that disagree it causes static
For the Original Black Asiatic man
Cream of the earth and was there first
And some devils want this from being unknown
But check out the books they own
(Public Enemy: Party For Your Right To Fight)

In these two fragments, a theory comes to the fore that is central in the Nation of Islam. This theory implies that the birthplace of all civilization is not in Europe, but in Africa⁷⁵. The earliest form of civilization came into existence in Egypt and not in Greece. According to the followers of the Nation of Islam, the Greeks stole the knowledge from the Egyptians on their conquests. Public Enemy puts this theory into words with the line 'We can top their best ideas'. At the side of this, the Nation of Islam assumes that the Black man was the Original man, from whom all other races have emanated. This idea is present in the fragment from 'Party For Your Right To Fight'. The rap group also points at this in 'Fear Of A Black Planet', in which Chuck D. raps:

⁷⁵ The name of Public Enemy's security organisation, The Security of the First World, also indicates this. Normally, the First World signifies Europe. Public Enemy however, uses the term to emphasize that civilization came into being in Africa.

Excuse us for the news
You might not be amused
But did you know White comes from Black
No need to be confused
Black man, black woman, black baby
White man, white woman, white baby
Black man, white woman, black baby
White man, black woman, black baby
(Public Enemy; Fear Of A Black Planet)

This illustrates that Public Enemy's raps are used to disseminate the ideas of the Nation of Islam among the Afro-Americans. In these ideas, the superiority of the black race is emphasized in order to bring back the sense of self-esteem, which was taken from the blacks by the whites. Lastly, the sentence 'And some devils want this from being known' needs explanation, because the ideology that is ventilated in it, is one of the central points in the Nation of Islam. According to the Nation of Islam, white people are a degenerate mutation of the original, black race who were created by God. Power was given to them for six thousand years to test the strength of the black race. The situation many black Americans find themselves in is a result of this. Therefore, followers of the Nation of Islam often refer to whites with the word devil. In the rap lyrics of Public Enemy, the word props up regularly. The 'white devil theory' enables black radical leaders to activate the resistance of the Afro-American community against white oppression.

These are some of the ideological pillars of the Nation of Islam, through which race consciousness is disseminated. Concretely, the concentration on black consciousness is among other things expressed in the wish to establish an economic base and the establishment of black schools which are grounded on the philosophy of the movement. The establishment of an economic base and Islamic black schools are simultaneously results and forming factors of the black awareness. That is, black awareness can bring about that Afro-Americans realize the profits of an economic base and Nation of Islam-oriented schools. On the other hand, an improvement of the economic position and an educational system which concentrates on the

black identity may bring about black self-respect.

Chapter 4 - Formalistic Aspects

In this chapter, I will pay attention to the formalistic aspects of the rap lyrics, music and outward presentation of Public Enemy. It is important to do this, in order to acquire more insight into the style and influence of the rap group. Firstly, Public Enemy has a heavy influence on other rappers. By paying attention to the formalistic side of Public Enemy, the attractiveness of the rap group to other rappers will be clarified. Secondly, a discussion of the formalistic aspects is significant, because they subscribe to the ideologies that are propagated by the band. I will pay attention to rhyme, use of language, musical aspects and the outward presentation of Public Enemy.

Rhyme

Rhyme is an essential element of rap. Over the years, rap has become one of the most lyrical forms of popular music. Even in the early years of rap, in a period when lyrics were clearly subordinate to the rap beat, the rhyme aspect is visible. One of the fragments of Kool Herc's slogans that was used earlier on in this thesis illustrates this:

As I scan the place
I see the very familiar face
Of my mellow: Wallace Dee in the house
Wallace Dee! Freak for me
(Nation Conscious Rap 1991: XI)

In one of the first commercial rapsongs, 'The Breaks' by Kurtis Blow, one can see that the rhyme scheme of early raps was quite simple:

To the girl in brown	a
Stop messin around	a
Break it up	b
Break it up	b
To the guy in blue	c
What you're gonna do	c
Break it up	b

Break it up	b
An to the girl in green	d
Don't be so mean	d
Break it up	b
Break it up	b
An the guy in red	e
Say what a set	e

(Kurtis Blow; The Breaks)

The transcription of 'The Breaks' which I have used here deviates from the one in chapter 1. It is justified to do this, because Kurtis Blow did not provide us with a transcription. I have used the transcription above to illustrate the most prominent rhyme scheme of rap lyrics. In 'The Breaks', Kurtis Blow uses end-rhyme according to the following scheme: aa, bb, cc, bb, dd, bb, ee. This means that the lyrics can be subdivided in lines in which the final words of two successive lines rhyme. Except for the first two lines, the rhyme is perfect. In the lines 'To the girl in brown/Stop messin around' the rhyme is imperfect. Only by pronouncing the word 'around' according to the rules of Black English, one can speak of perfect rhyme. This phenomenon will be dealt with more elaborately later on. The rhyme scheme in the rapsong dealt with above can be regarded as the basis of rap rhymes. The option for this rhyme scheme can be easily explained. Rap developed as part of the street culture in the black ghettos. The youths who participated in this street culture employed a creative, but considerably simple language. The rhymes of the disc jockeys and early MCs reflect the down to earth character of the black street culture. Next to this, the fact that rap rhymes used to be improvised plays a part in the simplicity of the rhyme scheme in rap. That is, it is difficult to use a highly complex rhyme scheme in improvised rap (which is also referred to as freestyle rap). After the commercialization of rap, the freestyle rap fell into desuetude ⁷⁶. Rap lyrics are put down to paper and therefore become more stylized. Some rappers even leave the writing of lyrics to professional song writers and concentrate entirely on the performance. Despite

76 It has to be said that youths in the inner cities who participate in hip hop culture employ the freestyle rap quite often. Especially in the so-called rap battles, the freestyle rap is a tool to compare one's rapping skills.

the closer attention that is paid to the rap rhymes, the aabb rhyme scheme is still the basis for a large number of rappers. Public Enemy, the rap group that has a creative song writer in the person of Chuck D., also employs this rhyme scheme quite frequently. Especially on their debut album 'Yo! Bum Rush The Show' the structure of the rhymes is simple. A fragment from the rapsong 'Sophisticated Bitch' provides evidence for this:

Little is known about her past	a
So listen to me cause I know her as	a
Used to steal money out of her boyfriend's clothes	b
And never got caught so the story goes	b
She kept doin' that to all her men	c
Found the wrong man when she did it again	c
And still to this day people wonder why	d
He didn't beat the bitch down till she almost died	d

(Public Enemy; Sophisticated Bitch)

When we compare the fragment from 'Sophisticated Bitch' to the excerpt from 'The Breaks' by Kurtis Blow, it can be seen that the rhyme schemes are identical, except for the fact that the lines 'Break it up/Break it up' interrupt the rhyme scheme in 'The Breaks'. Yet, despite the fact that the rhyme schemes are nearly identical, the fragment from 'Sophisticated Bitch' is more complex. 'The Breaks' consists of lines which are related only by rhyme. The recurrent lines 'Break it up/Break it up' indicate this marginal relationship. Public Enemy's 'Sophisticated Bitch' on the other hand, is clearly a rap with a message, dealing with a woman who victimizes men. In contrast with 'The Breaks', 'Sophisticated Bitch' is a contentual unity. It is obvious that writing a rapsong which deals with a single topic requires more creativity than writing nonsensical rhymes such as Kurtis Blow's.

The fragment from 'Sophisticated Bitch' contains an important formalistic aspect of rap; the use of Black English in rhyme. As was mentioned earlier in this thesis, Black English deviates considerably from standard American English. In 'Sophisticated Bitch', two examples of the use of Black English in rhyme can be found. The word 'ass' in line 2 only rhymes with 'past' in line 1 if 'past' is pronounced without the [t] as [pæs]. Black English has the tendency to leave the last sound of a word

unpronounced. In 'Sophisticated Bitch', this tendency is used to answer to the rhyme scheme. Only by applying the rules of Black English, perfect rhyme is brought about. The fact that Black English is more a colloquial language than a written language could be responsible for the official spelling of the words 'past' in line 1 and 'died' in line 8. Apart from that, Public Enemy uses the Black English spelling of words in some instances in this rapsong. The rap group seems to limit themselves to nouns and only uses the alternative spelling if it benefits the rhyme. Public Enemy chooses for the official spelling of the word 'thing' in the line 'Sucker who front like it ain't no thing', while the alternative spelling can be found in the lines 'Talk like this - don't talk slang/Do anything to get that thang'. Obviously, this is done in order to achieve perfect rhyme with the word 'slang'. In the line 'I know she's a ho so I'm a go expose the funky bitch', the word 'ho' can be found. 'Ho' is the Black English spelling of the word 'whore'. By using 'ho' instead of 'whore', Public Enemy accomplishes internal rhyme with the words 'so' and 'go', which appeals to the ear.

On the second Public Enemy album 'It Takes A Nation Of Millions To Hold Us Back', the aabb rhyme scheme is operated less strictly. The rapsong 'Prophets Of Rage' illustrates this change:

It's raw and keepin' you on the floor	a
It's soul and keepin' you in control	b
It's pt. 2 cause I'm	c
Pumpin' what you're used to	d
Until the whole juice crew	d
Gets me in my goose down	e
I do the rebel yell	f
And I'm the duracell	f
Call it plain insane	g
Brothers causin' me pain	g
When a brother's a victim	h
And the seller's a dweller in a cage	i
Yo, run the accapella	j
(Power of the people say)	k
(Public Enemy; Prophets Of Rage)	

In this fragment, which is 14 lines long, only 6 lines answer to the aabb rhyme scheme. The length of the lines is considerably shorter in comparison with the lines of 'Sophisticated Bitch'. The fact that Public Enemy uses less words per line may be responsible for the less prominent usability of the aabb rhyme scheme. It seems as if the rap group deliberately uses a deviating rhyme scheme. In my opinion, the shape in which 'Propets of Rage' is molded has a more powerful effect than the structure of 'Sophisticated Bitch'. That is, because of the short lines, the rapsong gains momentum. Meanwhile, the rhyme aspect is not lost, because of the use of internal rhyme and rhyme between words in the middle of successive lines. Examples of this are the words 'rebel' and 'yell' in line 7, 'plain' and 'insane' in line 9 and 'seller' and 'dweller' in line 12, where Public Enemy uses internal rhyme. Next to this, the word 'juice' in line 5 rhymes with 'goose' in line 6 and 'dweller' in line 12 (pronounced as [dweɪ]) rhymes with the word 'acapella' in line 13.

As was mentioned above, on 'It Takes A Nation Of Millions To Hold Us Back' a tendency in which long lines are replaced by shorter ones and a more inventive, less predictable rhyme scheme takes the place of the traditional one, can be detected. These changes manifest themselves even more clearly on Public Enemy's latest album 'Apocalypse 91: The Enemy Strikes Black'. In some of the rapsongs on 'Apocalypse 91: The Enemy Strikes Black', the lines have in some instances been reduced to words:

Now I'm ready to rap	a
Strong fax I swing	b
Like Bo Jax	c
I'm never calm on a bomb track	d
60 percent 3/fifths	e
Constituted	f
Huh prostituted	f
Why I'm mad	g
Cause it's written on the paper	h
Right now	i
Muther F--- bow	i
Kicked	j
The	k
Lyrics	l

About	m
The tricks	l
Of the trade and the money made	n
(Public Enemy; Move!)	

As can be deducted from the rhyme scheme, this rapsong is certainly not structured according to the aabb rhyme scheme. The aabb scheme is only used in 6 lines (3 - 4, 7 - 8, 11 - 12). Besides this rhyme scheme and the abab rhyme scheme, which is employed in lines 14 and 16, internal rhyme, alliteration and rhyme of words in the middle of two successive lines provide for the rhyming element. The structure of 'Move' can be converted into a more conventional form, such as can be found on the album 'Yo! Bum Rush The Show'. In one part of the rapsong this is especially evident:

The
Lyrics
About
The tricks
Of the trade and the money made

These lines can easily be manipulated, in order to create a more conventional rhyme form:

The lyrics about the tricks of the trade
And the money made

Why Public Enemy has opted for the first form in which the lines are divided into short parts is not entirely clear. In the context of the use of powerful, loaded terms, such as can be found in the lines '60 percent 3/fifths/Constituted/Huh prostituted', it seems plausible that Public Enemy wants to maintain this style and do not want to interchange lines which consist of a single word with long lines. Next to this, the in my opinion greater artistic value of the fragmentary rap lyrics may play a part in the choice for this form.

A striking rhyme aspect in 'Move!' is the use of alliteration. Alliteration can be found in the lines 'The tricks/Of the trade and the money made' (lines 16 en 17) and 'Now I'm ready to rap' (line 1). The alliteration which is used in these instances,

seems to function as a confirmation of the words and also reinforces the fragmentary structure of the rap ⁷⁷. The same point can be made about another part of 'Move!':

And the joints
Packed
Back to back with blacks
(Public Enemy; Move!)

In this excerpt as well, fragmentary phrases and the use of alliteration in the line 'back to back with blacks' bring about a powerful statement.

Use of Language

A formalistic aspect of Public Enemy's rap lyrics which needs discussion is the use of language. The language used in the raps of Public Enemy is innovative and creative. On the one hand, the members of the rap group try to make the lyrics attractive by means of a specific choice of words and the use of metaphors. On the other hand, the language does not transcend from the level of the street culture from which rap evolved. This is due to the fact that Public Enemy in the first place addresses the black youths in the ghettos. Their language is down to earth, and therefore the rap band employs it too. In this fashion, black youths can more easily identify themselves with Public Enemy. As a result, the messages which are worked into the rap lyrics are probably sooner accepted and strived after. It seems justified to say that Public Enemy carefully balances the use of innovative and creative language with language on the level of the black street culture. Next to this, it seems as if the rap group tries to attract young blacks by making use of Black English. Apart from that, the use of Black English is also related to the influence of the radical black movement Nation of Islam. This movement emphasizes the establishment of a black identity. Black English, which distinctly differs from standard American English, is a tool to achieve this goal. In Public Enemy's rap lyrics, the use of Black English is expressed in two ways. Firstly, a large number

77 For a thorough insight into the effect of alliteration in rap lyrics it is indispensable to listen to them in performance.

of slang words can be found on the group's albums. This use of slang seems to increase with every album that is released ⁷⁸. Secondly, the rap lyrics in transcription reflect Black English grammar:

Who count the money
In da neighborhood
(Public Enemy; Shut Em Down)

Do you really think they'll mind
To play the funky jams
That everybody wit'
Some Def Jef or Ice T
Show they rollin' wit' the syndicate
Or can dey can funky
With the underground
(Public Enemy; How To Kill A Radio Consultant)

In both excerpts, examples can be seen of the transition of spoken Black English into written Black English. In the line 'Show they rollin' wit' the syndicate', [ro:lin] and [wi] are pronounced as [ro:lin] en [wit], which is indicated in the transcription by the deletion of respectively the [g] en [h]. Next to this, the word 'are', which is customary in standard American English, is deleted between 'they' and 'rollin''. In the line 'In da neighborhood', Public Enemy has gone one step further. Here, the word 'the' (pronounced as []) is spelled 'da'. 'Da' is pronounced [da:].

Metaphors

The members of Public Enemy employ creative language in their lyrics. Often, issues are not called by their name, but described by means of metaphors. Some of these metaphors are strongly related to the black identity. That is, they use expressions that are both metaphoric and part of the Black

78 It would go too far to discuss the use of slang words in this thesis. Therefore, in the appendix I have included a list in which the slang words in the lyrics that have been used are explained. Some of the recurrent slang expressions in Public Enemy's lyrics will be more elaborately discussed in the section on metaphorical language.

English slang vocabulary. Other metaphors are more general and not directly related to the black world of thought. Below, some of the metaphors which often occur in Public Enemy's rap lyrics are discussed.

In my opinion, the most important metaphor used by Public Enemy is the term public enemy itself. The name of Public Enemy signifies the essence of the group. That is, the rap group considers themselves to be the largest (domestic) threat to the American government. Most of the ideas that are expressed by the members of the rap group link up with this enemy of the state metaphor. After all, in their rap lyrics the members of the band do everything to undermine the American establishment (which is synonymous for white America according to Public Enemy). Two other metaphors which are often used by Public Enemy link up with the enemy of the state metaphor. Firstly, the metaphor of the Uzi can be placed in this context. The Uzi frequently props up in Public Enemy's rap lyrics. Contrary to the suspicions of many people, the Uzi is only marginally related to the propaganda of physical violence. Most of all, the Uzi is used as a metaphor for the resistance against the oppression of blacks by means of rap. In other words, language becomes a hail of bullets from a verbal Uzi in the hands of Public Enemy. This line of thought is supported in 'Yo! Bum Rush The Show' and 'Miuzi Weighs A Ton':

I'm a public enemy but I don't rob banks
I don't shoot bullets and I don't shoot blanks
My style is supreme - number one is my rank
And I got more power than the New York Yanks
(Public Enemy; Miuzi Weighs A Ton)

Searchin' my body for fuckin' what?
Cause my gun shoots for fun and my knife don't cut
(Public Enemy; Yo! Bum Rush The Show)

These fragments indicate that Public Enemy regard their lyrics as a powerful weapon to fight the injustice that is done to black America. The comparison between the Uzi and Public Enemy's lyrics also indicates that the lyrical content is militant. In fact, Public Enemy pursues the aim of the Black Panther Party, the organisation of which the members tried to

claim their rights by means of physical violence, on the ideological level. In this context, the public enemy metaphor can be further clarified. The self-created image of the group as enemy of the state is confirmed when we take into account that the leaders of the Black Panther Party were either killed or imprisoned by the American government.

The second metaphor that is related to the metaphor of the group's name can be found in the word 'bass'. In many of Public Enemy's rapsongs this term occurs. The term 'bass' has meaning on different levels. On the first level, the word refers to the bass beat in the music of the rap group. On this level, the bass beat can be seen as a metaphor of the urban environment in which rap music came into existence. On the second level, the word 'bass' has another meaning. 'Bass' is pronounced the same as the word 'base', which means low. On this level, 'bass' is a metaphor of the underprivileged position of the Afro-Americans in the inner city areas. A fragment from 'Night Of The Living Baseheads' can help to illustrate the metaphoric meaning of the word 'bass' on this level:

And brothers try to get swift an
Sell to their own, rob a home
While some shrivel to bone
Like comatose walkin' around
Please don't confuse this with the sound
I'm talking about ... BASS
(Public Enemy; Night Of The Living Baseheads)

In the preultimate line of this fragment Chuck D. states that he is not talking about the bass beat, but about the social problems in the black ghettos. Still, the word 'bass' as a metaphor of the urban environment is meaningful as well. For, it is in the inner cities that the position of the Afro-Americans is most alarming. Therefore, the bass beat itself can be seen as a reference to the misery of life in the black ghetto. The bass metaphor subscribes to the enemy of the state metaphor in the sense that Public Enemy believes that every attempt to make black Americans aware of their underprivileged position is regarded as dangerous by the American establishment.

Interrelated with the deplorable socio-economic position of a large part of the Afro-American population are the metaphors of

Armageddon and Babylon. Originally, these are Biblical terms. In the context of the Old Testament, Babylon was the place where sin was rampant. Later, Babylon became a metaphor of the anti-moral and sinful elements in society. Public Enemy also uses the term Babylon as a metaphor for sin. Yet, the rap group places the metaphor in a different context. Where originally Babylon has reference to non-Christian societies, an anti-Christian walk of life and therefore a sinful life, Public Enemy employs the word to signify the corruption in American society, which is predominantly Christian. The Christian faith, which is to a large extent a white religion, is linked up with racism by the Islam-oriented rap group. Thus, Public Enemy reverses the meaning of the term Babylon and regards the United States of America as a sink of iniquity, in which white are guilty of oppressing the blacks. The evil surfaces among other things in the use of excessive force by the police towards blacks and the racist attitude of the government. The above-mentioned line of thought is illustrated in 'Get The F--- Outta Dodge' and 'By The Time I Get To Arizona':

I was roly-roll-a-roll rollin'
5-o looked and said hold it
And I stopped still
I never got ill
Cause my licence was clean an I showed
A peace pow wow
Instead of pow pow
I'm straight up and I'm straight
So how you like me now
But I know how you do
You're straight from Babylon
But I know how you do
You're straight from Babylon
(Public Enemy; Get The F--- Outta Dodge)

I pray every day
I do and praise jah the maker
Lookin' for culture
I got but not here
Pushin' and shakin' the structure
Bringin' down the Babylon
(Public Enemy; By The Time I Get To Arizona)

The term Armegeddon has a similar metaphoric meaning. Armegeddon is a Biblical term as well and signifies the battle between good and evil at the end of times. In this battle, good (in the original context Christianity) will finally defeat evil. Public Enemy places the metaphor in a black context. That is, in the lyrics of the rap group Armegeddon is used as a symbol of the victory over white oppression. In the discussion of subliminal information, I will pay attention to this metaphor more elaborately.

Public Enemy employs several metaphors which are related to the oppression of blacks by whites. First of all, the term 'Jack' occurs quite frequently in the rap lyrics of Public Enemy. An example of this can be found in the rapsong 'Move!':

Jack movin' out
Cause black movin' in
.....
(Listen) but 92 bring
An attitude
That say I don't give a
Fuck
About the old way
This is a new day
Tell Jack stay in the back
(Public Enemy; Move!)

'Jack' is the metaphor that is used by Public Enemy to refer to the whites in the United States. Especially in the first part of the fragment of 'Move' it becomes clear that 'Jack' is a metaphor of white America, thus of white racism as well. It is unclear why Public Enemy uses the word 'Jack' as a metaphor of whites. The name is common and does not seem to have racial overtones. A plausible answer to this question can perhaps be found in the meaning of the word 'Jack', which is assigned by The Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary of Current English. This dictionary defines 'Jack' among other things as 'the white ball in bowling'. In this context, the term 'Jack' has obvious relations with color. Public Enemy deals even more explicitly with the term in 'How To Kill A Radio Consultant'. In this rap, whites are not only referred to as 'Jack', they are called

'Jack the Ripper'. In this variant of the Jack metaphor, the thought that white America robbed and is still stealing from the black community is expressed. In the past, this happened by means of slavery and promises that were never kept ⁷⁹ Nowadays, the white control over among other things the rap music industry and black radio stations is regarded as theft by Afro-Americans, because profits for the larger part bypass the rap artists and whites have the power to gag deviant rappers. Another metaphor of white Americans is formed by the words 'the other man'. In the following fragment, it becomes clear that 'the other man' signifies the white Americans:

Malt liquor bull
What it is is bullshit Colt
45 another gun to the brain
Who's sellin' us pain
In the hood another up to no good
Plan that's designed by the other man
(Public Enemy; One Million Bottlebags)

In the context of 'One Million Bottlebags', the in itself neutral term 'the other man' becomes an incisive, deliberately impersonal metaphor for the repressive white society.

The metaphor 'anti-nigger machine' seems to be more directed at the government, and especially the police force. The excerpt below illustrates this:

Once they never gave a fuck about
What I said
Now they listen and want my head
I ain't wit' it
This is what I mean an anti-nigger machine
Instead of peace the police
Just wanna wreck and flex
On the kids
What I did was try to be the best
So they fingered the trigger
Figured I was a bigger nigger

79 An example is the 'forty acres and a mule' promise of general Grant, which implied that runaway slaves would be given a piece of land and a mule in order to begin a new life.

(Public Enemy; Anti-nigger Machine)

Public Enemy employs the anti-nigger machine metaphor to stress the racist attitude of the American government towards Afro-Americans. The central thought in the excerpt from 'Anti-nigger Machine' is that the government regards black Americans who try to fight their underprivileged position in society as a threat. In the lines 'Figured I was a bigger nigger', Public Enemy possibly refers to the protagonist of Richard Wright's novel Native Son. The protagonist, Bigger Thomas, is hunted down and sentenced to death because of his deviant behavior. If Public Enemy is consciously referring to Native Son, they seem to regard Bigger Thomas as a symbol of the black American who does not adapt to the white establishment. This subscribes to the attitude of Public Enemy and the attempts of the rap group to organize resistance within the Afro-American community against white oppression.

Noise

The music of Public Enemy contains ideological points of view. It is very difficult to describe these in writing. Therefore, I will limit myself to a general discussion of an important musical element: the use of the so-called noise. Noise can be defined as the use of counter sounds, which seem to be a negative of 'natural' sounds. Noise is perceived by the ear as a series of wailing sounds, which can be best compared with the sounds that are produced by a siren. Noise seems to be a-melodic. Yet, in combined action with a powerful beat, noise results in a musical background in which melody and anti-melody are in balance. Public Enemy employs noise as a symbol of the gloom of the living conditions of many Afro-Americans. Therefore, the siren-like noise can be considered to be a musical extension piece of life in the inner city areas that is characterized by violence and crime. Next to this, noise seems to symbolize the disproportionate force of the police towards Afro-Americans. In my opinion, it is therefore justified to regard noise as a tool by means of which Public Enemy tries to recreate the reality of the black ghetto.

Subliminal information

In addition to their rap lyrics, the members of Public Enemy work their political messages into the covers of their albums. This so-called subliminal information (i.e. the hidden information which is decoded by the subconsciousness of the person who sees or hears it) has much to say about the ideas of the rap group. As far as the ideologies of Public Enemy have not been dealt with, I will briefly describe the subliminal information on the covers of their albums.

Chuck D. and Flavor Flav can be seen on the cover of the second Public Enemy album 'It Takes A Nation Of Millions To Hold Us Back' (see the photograph on page 111). Both stand behind the bars of what seems to be a police or prison cell. In the first place, this indicates that the Afro-Americans in general are deprived of most of their rights. The discussion of the social problems that scourge the black ghettos and the political powerlessness of black America have shown that this is not exaggerated. The words 'freedom is a road seldom traveled by the multitude', which are printed under the picture, subscribe to the thought that black Americans are treated as second rate civilians. In the second place, the photograph on which Chuck D. and Flavor Flav illustrates the position in which they find themselves. Because of their radical statements, they are regarded as dangerous to the state by the government. Chuck D. is on the black list of the FBI, which gives an indication of the fact that the government considers Public Enemy to be a real threat. Chuck D. talks about this in 'Louder Than A Bomb':

This style seems wild
Wait before you treat me like a stepchild
Let me tell you why they got me on file
'Cause I give you what you lack
Come right and exact
Our status is the saddest
So I care where you at, black
And at home I got a call from Tony Rome
The FBI was tappin' my telephone
(Public Enemy; Louder Than A Bomb)

The fact that Chuck D. and Flavor Flav are the only two group members who have been photographed behind bars can be explained

by pointing to the fact that they strike the eye because of the militant stance in their rap lyrics. The other members of Public Enemy, Terminator X and Professor Griff are only rarely heard on albums. Therefore, they are not considered to be a direct danger by the American government. The bars also imply that people try to gag Public Enemy. In various ways, apponents try to impose silence upon the rap group and bring them into disrepute. For example, many radio stations refuse to play the Public Enemy songs in the peak hours of the day and MTV shows only the least controversial videos ⁸⁰. At the side of this, mainstream media use any possibility to put the members of the rap group in an unfavorable light.

On both 'It Takes A Nation Of Millions To Hold Us Back' and 'Apocalypse 91; The Enemy Strikes Black', Flavor Flav can be seen with a huge clock around his neck. The clock plays a part in the ideology of the rap band. In fact, the attribute is the embodiment of the question which Malcolm X asked the people who listened to his speeches: 'What time is it?'. With this question, the black leader aimed at the forming of the black awareness, which he considered to be a prerequisite for the improvement of the living conditions in black America. The theory that white people are devils, who have been created by God to test the strength of the black race, is important in the symbolism of the clock. That is, in the Armegeddon, which is symbolized by the hour of twelve, the power of the whites will be broken. A fragment from 'Party For Your Right To Fight' affirms the symbolism of the clock:

This party started right in '66
With a pro-black radical mix
then at the hour of twelve
Some force cut the power
And emerged from hell
It was your so called government
(Public Enemy; Party For Your Right To Fight)

On the cover of 'It Takes A Nation Of Millions To Hold Us

80 The video clip of the song 'By The Time I Get To Arizona', in which the members of Public Enemy assassinate fictitious politicians, was put under a ban in the United States.

Back', the clock points to eleven. This seems to indicate that Public Enemy is convinced that the oppression of the black Americans has almost come to an end. The clock which Flavor Flav wears around his neck on 'Apocalypse 91: The Enemy Strikes Black' however, stands at nine. This could be a symbolic way of telling that in the eyes of Public Enemy the end of the oppression has not come nearer, but that time has been turned back by the growing racial inequality in the United States under influence of the Reagan and Bush Administrations.

The last example of subliminal information that I want to discuss can be found on the cover of 'Apocalypse 91: The Enemy Strikes Black'. Here, Chuck D. is holding a death's-head with a helmet in his hands. In the context of the words 'justice evolves only after injustice is defeated' (which are printed below the picture) a speculation can be made about the signification of the death's-head. That is, the skull that is held by Chuck D. can be regarded as a symbol of white oppression. It seems as if Public Enemy is saying that the black Americans' struggle against white supremacy will eventually turn out to the advantage of the black race. The fact that Public Enemy shows the symbol of oppression as a trophy, seems to indicate that the members of the group think that the attitude which is preached by the radical black leader Louis Farrakhan, of whom they consider themselves to be disciples, will lead the black Americans to equality.

Conclusions

In this chapter, it has become clear that the members of Public Enemy are endowed with lyrical talents which have enabled them to innovate rap. Under influence of Public Enemy rhyme has undergone changes. Public Enemy has succeeded in balancing the use of simple rhyme schemes with creativity. That is, the rap group has transposed rap to a higher artistical level by means of flexible rhyme schemes, internal rhyme, alliteration and experiments with line length without losing contact with the black street culture from which rap evolved. On the one hand, in the rap lyrics of the group a tendency is visible in which Black English becomes an ever more prominent element. Because of this, Public Enemy remains loyal to the black youths. On the other hand, Public Enemy frequently makes use of creative

language, in which metaphors have a prominent place. As a result, Public Enemy transcends the sometimes hackneyed phrasing of other rap styles, such as the gangster rap. The outward presentation adds to the appeal of Public Enemy. The education of the black youths does not stop with the lyrics. The photographs which can be found on the covers of Public Enemy's albums subscribe to the ideology of the rap band, as can be concluded from the section on subliminal information. Even the musical side of Public Enemy reflects the group's points of view.

Closure

The atom had no color so it had to take the color of its environment which was total blackness. So when we bring forth music or rap, music has no color, but if its source is black, it will be black because it's going to have to take the color of its environment which is blackness.

- Poor Righteous Teachers

Rap: a Mosaic of the Life in Black America

Within two decades, rap music has developed into an important mouthpiece of the Afro-American community. In rap lyrics, the whole scope of aspects that make up black life are dealt with. Public Enemy is one of the rap groups who have made it their object to place the black Americans (and at the side of this the rest of the world) in the possession of the facts that reduce black Americans in the inner city areas into second rate civilians. They regard unemployment, housing problems, black on black violence and drug addiction as factors, with the help of which a segregation of a part of the Afro-American population is brought about, despite official racial equality. Segregation is undoubtedly present in the United States. One does not need to be a radical Black Muslim in order to come to this conclusion. Otherwise than the segregatory laws that deprived the black Americans from most of their rights until the sixties, the 'new' segregation does not cover the entire Afro-American population. As a result of the struggle of among others the Civil Rights Movement, a section of the black American population has obtained a place in the middle class. Yet, the poor who have stayed behind in the inner cities have to contend with a form of segregation. Because of their deplorable living conditions they find themselves in a position of socio-economic isolation, from which escape is almost impossible. The socio-economic segregation is at the same time a racial segregation. After all, nearly 90 % of the poor people in the inner city areas are of African descent.

The rap lyrics of Public Enemy give an idea of the way in which this socio-economic segregation is brought about and

maintained. According to Public Enemy, all problems originate from the racism that is deeply rooted in American society. The racist attitude of the American government sees to it that the opportunities of young Afro-Americans in the inner cities are minimal. They are dependent on the public school sector for their education. The quality of the education in the public schools is extremely low. Black youths who leave high school with a diploma are more often than not forced to look for a job in the underpaid sectors of the labor markets. Moreover, these sectors are sensitive to economic recessions, which makes unemployment a constant threat. At the side of this, the educational system is not attuned to the black youths. The history of their ancestors is not included in the curricula. The formation of a black identity is hampered by this. According to Public Enemy, this is one of the reasons why a large number of black Americans are addicted to drugs and alcohol. The high rate of joblessness contributes to the drug use and the excessive alcohol consumption as well. In the opinion of the rap group, the possibility to use drugs and alcohol is stimulated by the American government due to the large number of liquor stores that can be found in the black neighborhoods and a wrong approach to the drug problem. Next to this, the drug use accelerates the propagation of the Aids virus among Afro-Americans; and also the black on black violence is frightfully increased as a result of the tidal wave of drugs ⁸¹. The hard approach to the drug use and drug criminality by the American government concentrates on more severe penalties for users and dealers, which sees to it that a growing number of black males end up behind bars. The high mortality rate among Afro-American males and their disproportionately large representation in the prison population contribute to the fact that a considerable number of the families in the inner cities include only one parent. This phenomenon, which is referred to as feminization of poverty ⁸², reinforces the hopelessness of life in the inner cities. Single mothers have to work in order

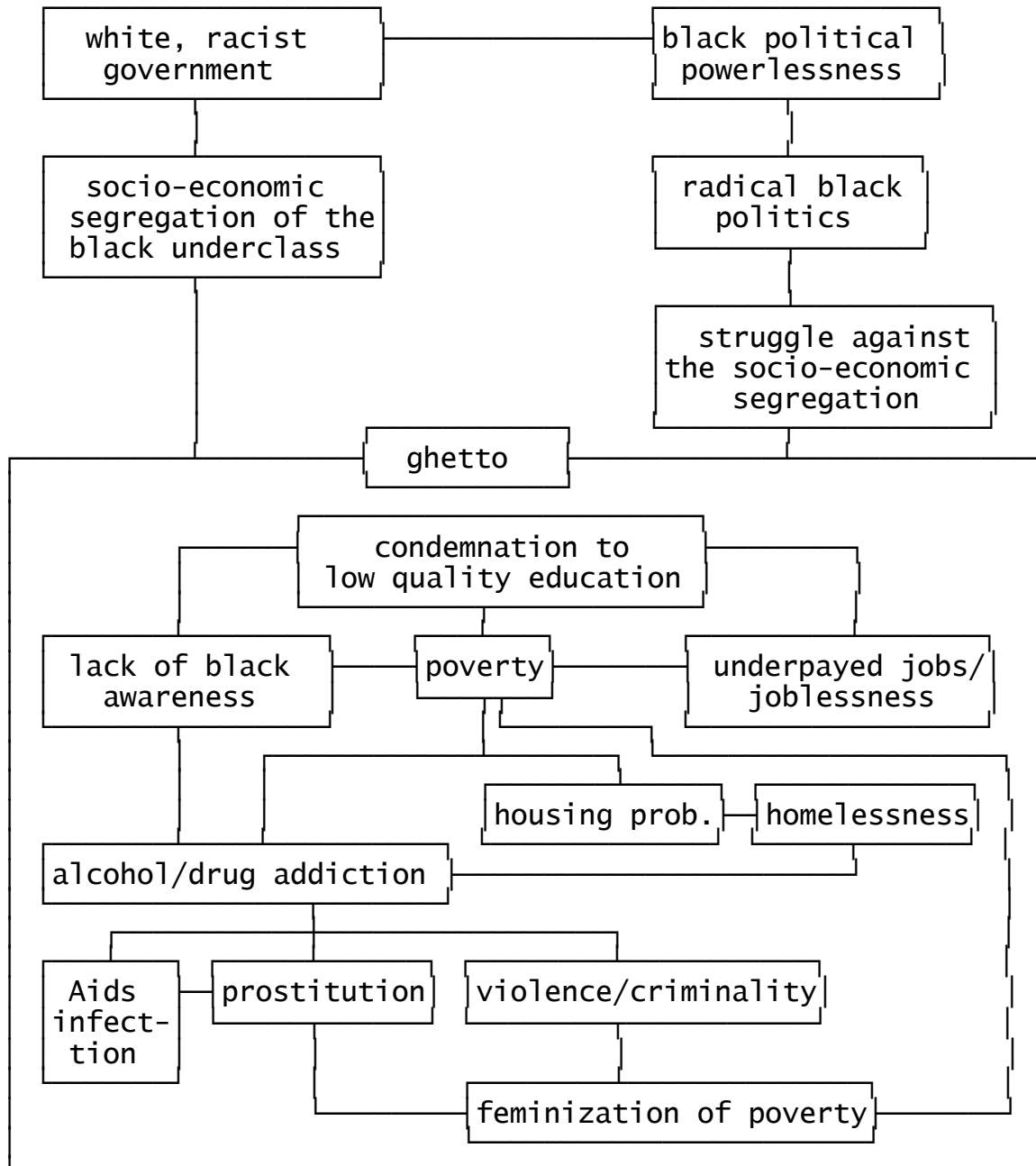
81 73 out of every 100 thousand black males are killed by another black male. For whites, this number amounts to 12.5 per 100 thousand.

82 In the inner city areas of New York, Chicago and Philadelphia there are schools where it is normal that only two or three children in a class come from two-parent families (Parool 5/12/87).

to survive or seek refuge in drugs, leaving their children to the overburdened educational system. The generally very low incomes force Afro-Americans to look for housing in the paupered neighborhoods of the inner city ghettos. They cannot afford to rent houses outside the ghetto. Even in the ghettos, the number of available houses decreases as a result of renovation projects and uninhabitableness by neglect. This causes an increase in the number of black Americans who have to live a homeless life. Homelessness facilitates drug use and drug criminality.

the socio-economic problems that the black underclass in the inner city ghettos has to contend with can be laid down in a figure ⁸³. Beside the social problems, the comparative political powerlessness of the black Americans is expressed in this figure. The place of the radical black political leaders, who operate outside the political establishment, is indicated as well:

⁸³ I have composed this figure with the help of the data I collected.



The above-mentioned figure mentions that the problems that control the lives of the Afro-Americans in the inner city areas are indissolubly bound up with each other and affect each other negatively. The sparing actions that have been taken to fight these problems are no more than drops in the proverbial ocean. Although the rap lyrics of Public Enemy do not as easily create the shock effect in the early 1990s as they did when 'Yo! Bum Rush The Show' was released in 1987, the message of the New York rap group is more up to date and confronting than ever. It is also important to note that Public Enemy has brought about a shift in the rap scene. In the hands of Public Enemy, rap has become a powerful weapon in the struggle for equality. A weapon that is so powerful that the American government narrowly

watches Public Enemy and neutralizes their impact as much as possible. The raps of Public Enemy are a source of inspiration for young, incipient talents, who take over the banner and look after innovation of the thematical political rap. The rise of new, politically conscious rappers enables Public Enemy to bring the establishment of an economic basis to the attention of the black community. Instead of working for whites (which Public Enemy regards as a form of slavery) Afro-Americans have to work for their own community. In this manner, the black Americans will become less vulnerable to the racist attitude of white America, that presently condemns them to a second rate societal position. Gaining control over the rap music industry is part of this plan. The possession of black-controlled radio and television stations also contributes to this. Beside, black-controlled schools, in which the education is of high quality and attuned to the black identity, can help to acquire a favorable socio-economic position.

Public Enemy has not only innovated rap in the contentual field. Also the formalistic features of Public Enemy's raps show both lyrically and musically the ability to bring about innovations. The often simple rhyme schemes of rap lyrics have been partially replaced by a more creative use of rhyme, among other things by means of internal rhyme and alliteration. In my opinion, the short rap lines used by Public Enemy add to the artistic value as well. The establishment of a black identity is formalistically expressed through the use of Black English. Grammatical, phonological and semantic characteristics of Black English are present in the lyrics of the rap group. Another formalistic element is the use of subliminal information. By means of subliminal information on album covers, the members of Public Enemy try to deliver their ideological messages. In the musical field the so-called noise has in view the same effect. That is, by means of siren-like sounds, Public Enemy tries to put their rap lyrics in an urban context, which reflects the ugliness of ghetto life.

It is justified to say that Public Enemy does not wrongly blame the racism in American society for standing in the way of concrete improvements. Public Enemy's appeal for the formation of a black economic base seems to be the only way to escape the vicious circle that is called the ghetto, though results will probably only be produced at the long term. Whether all of these initiatives discussed in this thesis will be successful

is uncertain. Undoubtedly, solutions for the socio-economic and political problems of the black community in the United States will be attended with a hard fight. To put it in the words of Public Enemy: 'The future holds nothing but confrontation'.

LEXICON

In the short list below, the slang words that occur in the fragments of rap lyrics that have been used in this thesis are elucidated.

- afro (p. 10) hair style as is was popular in the 1970, in which the hair is worn straight up
- anti-nigger machine (p. 109) police
- baddest (p. 11) the best
- bag (p. 42) condom
- battle (p. 19) rap contest
- b-boy (p. 72) male hip hopper
- bite (p. 20) steal
- blue (p. 71) police
- bomb track (p. 99) rap on which 'Bomb Squad', a band that works with Public Enemy can be heard
- buzz (p. 46) get a kick
- clockin' out (p. 39) going crazy
- cold chillin' (p. 27) enjoy intensely
- cracker (p. 28) asshole
- crew (p. 82) rap band with following, Here: all race conscious Afro-Americans
- crib (p. 39) housing
- devil (p. 53) white people
- dissed (p. 88) snapped at
- dope (p. 28) extremely good
- dough (p. 87) money
- fax (p. 99) black slang for facts
- fiend (p. 84) curse
- 5-o (p. 106) police
- fizz (p. 44) taxation
- fresh (p. 25) looking good
- get swift (p. 105) be successful
- get ill (p. 106) react negatively
- goner (p. 74) dead person
- green (p. 2) money
- his story (p. 58) history of white America

- hittin' mega pipes (p. 40) smoke crack cocain
- ho (p. 42) short for whore
- hood (p. 65) short for neighborhood
- ain't wit' it (p. 71) ik ben het er niet mee eens
- Jack (p. 64) white people
- jam (p. 73) swinging song
- Jimmy (p. 24) short for 'Jimbrowski' (penis)
- joint (p. 66) penitentiary
- minimal (p. 71) nonsense
- other man (p. 45) white people
- piece (p. 2) fire-arms
- peace pow wow (p. 106) non-agressive attitude
- pop (p. 19) father
- pris (p. 14) short for prison
- pros (p. 27) short for professionals
- project (p. 65) housing in the black ghetto
- pusher (p. 16) drug dealer
- reefer (p. 15) soft drug
- rollin' wit' (p. 87) agree with
- taking no shorts (p. 84) be not be trifled with
- 3/fifths (p. 99) reference to the American
constitution in which is laid
down that an Afro-American is
to a white American as 3/5 is
to 1

- system (p. 39) sound system
- Uncle Tom (p. 82) black who cooperates with or is
in league with whites

- underground (p. 87) hardcore hip hop
- wack (p. 60) bad, worthless
- wicked (p. 27) hard, very good
- wild thingin' (p. 42) have sex
- word (p. 2) indeed

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