

Where Is Jill Scott?: The Significance of Cultural Mulattoes on Disrupting Class Identity

Archetypes

By

Chloe Scott

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Chairperson Dorothy Pennington

Tammy Kernodle

Clarence Lang

Alesha Doan

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The Thesis Committee for Chloe Scott

certifies that this is the approved version of the following thesis:

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Chairperson Dorthy Pennington

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Abstract

The purpose of this work is to demonstrate the occurrence and fluidity of cross-cultural exchanges exhibited through cultural mulattoes. Jill Scott serves as a working example of cultural mulatto characteristics, a person who can be a black urban, working-class person with middle-class aspirations and who navigates between working-class and middle-class. The framework contextualizes a qualitative critical, interpretive word based approach to the music of Jill Scott's first album, *Who is Jill Scott? Words and Sounds, Vol. 1* as Scott navigates between classes. The position allows for further exploration on how a person obtains and executes social, political, and cultural capital—as in the case of cultural mulattoes—to increase a person's probability of having privilege and earning potential in real social settings.

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Chapter One

Nature of the Study

Who is Jill Scott? The question is part of soul music songwriter and singer Jill Scott's 2000 debut album entitled, *Who Is Jill Scott, Words & Sounds, Vol.1*. The question invokes curiosity and develops a connection between artist and audience. Mystery surrounds the artist's identity beyond the musical persona. Who is she? In one sense, identity becomes a journey of self-exploration leading to self-affirmation. Different experiences create an identity that manifests in a number of ways. Since music is reflective of societal issues (Baker 3), what does soul artist Jill Scott reveal about the ever-changing landscape of society? The lineage of the 1960s and 70s soul music represents historical snapshots of revolution, innovation, community, tradition, and cultural preservation. As a soul artist, Scott captures the essence of soul music, but reinterprets and transforms soul music to embody the personal yet collective experience of many blacks of the post-Civil Rights generation.

Although Scott grew up in a working-class environment, she was exposed to different cultural elements. Those different cultural elements are revealed in her lyrics, videos, and fusing various genres into her music approach. After listening to Scott's eclectic lyrics referencing collard greens, jazz, and diverse religions implications, I realized part of her identity encompasses contrasting archetype class characteristics. Scott's ability to apply various identities reflects her ability to navigate between classes, making her a cultural mulatto. I define cultural mulatto as a person who can be a black urban, working-class person with middle-class aspirations and who navigates between working-class and middle-class. My definition of cultural mulattoes reveals the complexity of the class landscape by focusing on people who operate within both class worlds. This project uses Jill Scott as an individualized representation of cultural mulattoes; therefore, this is not a generalizable depiction of all cultural mulattoes.

I will be using the music of soul artist Jill Scott as a working example of a cultural mulatto to address the question, “Does Jill Scott disrupt the either/or binary? And if so, how does Jill Scott demonstrate navigation between working-class and middle-class worlds in her first album, *Who Is Jill Scott, Words and Sounds, Vol. 1* to disrupt the either/or binary of class identities in a post-segregation era?” The either/or binary of class identities refers to opposing socioeconomic groups within black culture identified by black scholars. For the purpose of this study, I use the term class to identify behavior and socioeconomic class or economic class to identify a person’s financial income.

The idea of cultural mulattoes first appeared in Trey Ellis’ *The New Black Aesthetic* (1989). This project expands Ellis’ concept of cultural mulattoes. Cultural mulattoes encapsulate blacks of the middle-class who are “educated by a multi-racial mix of cultures and can navigate easily in the white world” (Ellis 235). Unlike the historical concept of mulattoes, meaning black and white mixed heritage, mulattoes in this project expresses a combination of multi-cultural class influences. Cultural mulattoes consistently negotiate and perform various archetype class identities in different social situations. Class archetype identities occur through behavioral spaces such as language, dress, and demeanor that carry social meaning.

Furthermore, I slightly deviate from Ellis’ concept by not placing great emphasis on race. In the interest of intraracial relationships, examining class systems focuses the exploration of diversity and cross-cultural exchanges. Race is relevant to middle-class blacks as an influence in the intraracial politics of respectability (Gaines 3-4). Black middle-class values maintain ideals of American mainstream or white dominant discourse for understanding Western imitated class expectations (Gaines 3-4). The focus on intraracial relationships nullifies a homogenous representation of blacks and offers deeper analysis of social conflicts and negotiations without the context of race. In addition, the focus on intraracial relationships offers a deeper analysis of

social conflicts and negotiations in the context of class relations. For the purpose of this project, I define cross-cultural exchanges of class as a performance of social and cultural norms associated with middle and working-class archetype identities.

The rise of cultural mulattoes has grown more so than previously, which makes the dynamic of the post-Civil Rights generation so interesting. Cultural mulattoes have existed throughout history, but the rise of cultural mulattoes is a byproduct of Civil Rights activism, garnering access to certain social institutions and paradigms. Since cultural mulattoes stem from the sociopolitical and economic gains of desegregation, cultural mulattoes engage with different communities of classes. Cultural mulattoes are the processing bridge between the Civil Rights generation, striving for social entrée and the generation that endures the maturation of sociopolitical and economic accesses gained because of desegregation. The access granted cultural mulattoes through the previous generation's activism, allows them to escape the behavioral status quo ascribed to economic groups. Therefore, cultural mulattoes find agency, self-empowerment by individualized, self-defining aspects of identity. They are able to pull from different cultural influences seen through television, film, and news, as well as their life experiences and incorporate a hybrid class identity.

Jill Scott personifies the essence of cultural mulatto, a group of individuals advancing the continuum of a self-development pattern from black working-class life that changed traditional markers of class distinctions. The deprivation of income did not allow many working-class people access to certain education, organization, and cultural spaces; however, individuals such as Vernon Johns,¹ exhibit the characteristics of self-development. Johns grew up in a working-class family and mainly taught himself four different languages before receiving formal high

¹ Biographical information vernonjohns.org

school and college education. A contemporary example is Jill Scott, who embraces an individualized self-development by navigating through music in an unorthodox way due to her lack of formal training. Education and middle-class aspiration is a step toward entrée, which allows access into other realms such as upper class social spaces, job opportunities, and political spaces. Cultural mulattoes disrupt the economic status aspect of identity by being able to gain access to some of the privileging given to upper classes and permeate between the various class worlds and seeing the world from two vantage points.

Identifying class exhibits a slippery slope of ever-changing definitions to define characteristics outside of income to identify upper and lower classes. Prior to desegregation, societal traditional markers to identify certain economic groups were more fixed than after segregation. Class defines access to privileges in health, education, jobs, and networking. Class emphasizes differences in working conditions, life choices, diet, neighborhood, family structure, justice system, and geographic isolation (“Class Matters xiii). Traditional markers of class behavior characteristics included religious affiliation, social organizations, higher education, consumption, parenting, and political parties. Scott disrupts the traditional markers, the characteristics associated with economic classes by combining these aspects inside the space of her lyrics and videos. By doing so, Scott advances the cultural mulatto personification, which allows her to navigate between the classes.

Purpose of the Study

Traditionally, academic language has been limited in categorizing identities due to social and cultural shifts in socioeconomic class status and class behaviors that have created more complex and fluid identities. I want to acknowledge the diversity of the language used to describe differing black identities. The purpose of this study is not to agree or disagree with traditional or contemporary scholars’ philosophies on whether their depictions of identities are

accurate. The language of contemporary scholars' positions a new framework that expands discussion about black class identities to reveal that blacks are not "either this", "or that" but a multitude of identities. Expanding characterizations reveal that blacks comprise an array of identities influenced by shifting sociopolitical and economic environments. Consequently, (behavioral) archetypes that mainstream attributes to a particular class begin to collapse in the context of cross-cultural exchanges of class. Writers such as Bill Keller of the New York Times, realize the traditional class markers (i.e. religion, political party, conspicuous consumption, leisure, and aesthetics) have become obscured, but continue to not distinguish between class behavior and socioeconomic status.

Mary Patillo's *Black on the Block* (2007) discusses a difference between class and status. Class involves an everyday practice where "we express our own class standing and read others' class positions through signs of language, dress, demeanor, performance, and other objects and behaviors that have social meaning and that can be mapped onto the class hierarchy" (Patillo 13; Mantsios 181). Status, on the other hand, classifies "groups [that] are stratified according to the principles of their consumption of goods" (Patillo 13). Unlike the economic factor of class, or status according to Patillo, the cultural factors, or rather behavioral factors exchange across class to produce cultural mulattoes who disrupt the either/or binary of class identities to describe blacks. Cultural mulattoes' ability to navigate between classes is their ability to mimic class through behavioral markers of language, dress, demeanor, and performance. In the documentary *Class Dismissed: How TV Frames the Working Class* (2005), author and cultural historian, Pepi Leistyna provided three types of class descriptions. The first class is *economic class*, which describes income and accumulated wealth. Next is *political class*, which defines the power to influence the public and political process, and lastly, *cultural class* depicts class, taste, and lifestyle known as cultural capital. Leistyna's class distinctions conceive that class is always in

flux. Therefore, the goal of the project intends to comprehend if Jill Scott as a cultural mulatto disrupts the notion of the either/or binary of class identity that is so common.

Significance of the Study

I will use the term (Neo)soul² when citing critics and scholars, distinguishing between early stages of soul music and contemporary soul, and for the sake of mainstream understanding. Critics who write on (Neo)soul create distinctions between early forms of soul and contemporary soul that began in the 90s. The term *Neo* is placed in parentheses because most (Neo)soul artists consider themselves soul artists (David 698; Cunningham 240-242, 244; George 186). By (Neo)soul, I refer to contemporary soul music (circa 1990) that extends soul music of the 1970s in musical style and lyrical content (George 186-187). (Neo)soul continues the soul music aesthetic. Yet, its instrumentation and lyrics are appropriated to address contemporary changes of desegregation, global culture, aesthetic sensibilities, and digital enhancements.

(Neo)soul's contribution to understanding cross-cultural class exchanges may alter or perpetuate the present discussions of hip-hop. From the 1990s to the present, hip-hop has been an intricate part of academic and non-academic discussion circles. Many scholars and critics survey hip-hop's cultural influence and social implications across the globe. As hip-hop became a commercial success, commodified by major music labels, the discussions of hip-hop increased (Stewart 199). Hip-hop represents a youth movement with changing social and economic landscapes (Pough 4; Watkins 7). Within the context of class, the social implications of hip-hop revealed two prominent distinctions. First, hip-hop revealed the economic, social, and political

² (Neo)soul was first used by writer, Joe Brown in 1987 for a Washington Post article, where Brown is using the term to "describe rappers turned soul singers Force M. D's as 'superior neo-soul'.

disparities of the black urban landscape. Secondly, the popularity of hip-hop introduced the black urban landscape to a variety of class, ethnic, and racial diversities.

Scholars regard [black] music as an urban platform for working-class people to express collective consciousness related to social, economic, and political issues. Working-class people process their social culture and gain a sense of agency through music. Therefore, black music, more specifically blues, funk, hip-hop, and soul, has provided a way of self-expression for working-class people (Davis 20-21; Baraka 137-40; Watkins 7). As a working-class woman, Jill Scott through (Neo)soul provides insight into the current state of class identities resulting from social, political, and economic influences, which cultivate cross-cultural class exchanges that are unrecognized or underrepresented in current scholarship. Scholarship focusing on hip-hop and soul music will benefit from the results of this study to grasp a better understanding of music's influences on the complexities and diversity of identities.

Literature Review

Contemporary and traditional scholars advance the view of diversity among blacks, eliminating a monolithic identity, projected by mainstream, by exhibiting separate socioeconomic class identities. *Traditional* scholars perpetuate the either/or binary of class. They use dichotomous terms to discuss black economic class identities. Many prominent black scholars (e.g. Paula Giddings, W.E.B. Du Bois, and Henry Louis Gates, Jr.) perpetuate binary distinctions by using a range of names such as *privileged* and *disenfranchised*,³ and *Talented Tenth* and *black masses*⁴ as indicators of diversity of blacks based on economic class. Talented Tenth and black masses characterize the black elite (middle-class) and working-class. Talented

³ Privileged and disenfranchised characterize middle-class and working-class blacks. See film documentary by Henry Louis Gates, Jr., *America Beyond the Color Line: Dialogues with African-Americans* (2004).

⁴ Talented Tenth and black masses See W.E. B. Du Bois, *The Negro Problem: A Series of Articles by Representative Negroes of To-day* (1903).

Tenth depicts the theory of developing the best of the race. Talented Tenth describes one of ten black men becoming leaders of the black community through the means of education (Du Bois 15-16). Once they [black affluent males] are educated, they are positioned in leadership roles to guide the black masses in refinement (Du Bois 15). Education, wealth, and even skin complexion established the characteristics of black class identities. Using dichotomous terms does not capture the microidentities of class. The binary represents a broad yet, simplified distinction to describe the complications of socioeconomic and behavioral class identities. The binary does not indicate the full relationships and social and cultural influences exchanged between classes.

Contemporary scholars such as Eugene Robinson, Patrick Johnson, and Toure', however, differ from traditional scholars by expanding class identities. Contemporary ideas of multiple identities are stronger analytical frames than historical ideas of the binary system. The analytical frames no longer use a dichotomy to illustrate class identities, but use multiple terms to characterize class identities. By expanding the characterizations of class identities, contemporary scholars disrupt the either/or binary of class. For instance, Eugene Robinson (2010) provides four basic characteristics to describe persons of differing socioeconomic classes:

a *Mainstream* middle-class majority with a full ownership stake in American society; 2) a large *Abandoned* minority with less hope of escaping poverty and dysfunction than at any time since Reconstruction's crushing end; 3) a small *Transcendent* elite with such enormous wealth, power, and influence that even white folks have to genuflect [and] 4) two newly *Emergent* groups—individuals of mixed-race heritage and communities of recent black immigrants—that make us wonder what “black” is even supposed to mean (Robinson 5).

Robinson's concept of *Abandoned* “minority with less hope of escaping poverty and dysfunction than at any time since Reconstruction's crushing end” and “*Emergent* groups individuals of mixed-race heritage and communities of recent black immigrants” first appear as rigid identities

because either a person is born mixed race or has to relocate to the US to be an immigrant. It's unclear if Robinson identifies these groups in particular to demonstrate a group's(dis)advantages in America.

Robinson provides elaborate explanations about each group and each groups' behavior and societal expectations for each group. For instance, Robinson describes middle-class blacks' qualities as "part of the American mainstream [who] buy too much on credit with high and often unrealistic expectations, they drive automobiles that are excessively large and wasteful, they become emotionally attached to professional sports teams made up of wealthy, spoiled, indifferent, athletes—in short—they behave just like other Americans" (194). There is flexibility to move through different socioeconomic classes in only the *Mainstream* and *Abandoned*, categories, however, Robinson perceives access into other economic classes (or racialized class seen in the *Emergent* group) as minimal. Because access is minimal and the categories are somewhat rigid, there is the potential to create negative stereotypes around economic class, based on systemic behaviors illustrated, same as traditional scholars.

Robinson uses Elijah Anderson's example of *code-switching* from *Code of the Street* (1999) as an example of fluidity among the classes. Anderson claims that *decent* people among the *Abandoned* share many of the middle-class values of the wider society, but know that the open display of such values carries little weight on the street (202). *Code-switching* indicates a person's ability to possess cultural capital and the use of code-switching is a tool to gain access to economic and political capital. In essence, the characterization allows for a combination and fluid identity, which can evolve to fit various social spaces, as my analysis of Jill Scott's music will demonstrate.

In addition to Robinson's multiple identities, author Gwendolyn Pough (*Check It While I Wreck It 2004*), identifies black urban working-class women under a *ghetto girl* classification

illustrated in 1990s black films, consisting of the *tweener*, and *hoochie* or *chickenhead*. Pough characterizes the women as follows: “the young single *baby mama*, the *tweener* (with one foot in the ghetto, one foot out of the ghetto, and the bourgeois aspirations). And the *hoochie* or *chickenhead* is usually represented as a product of her environment, hanging out with or loving bad boys, drinking, and with no desire to change or better herself or her surrounding” (134-5). The images are similar to the prevailing negative stereotypes of black women as the *Sapphire*, *jezebel*, and *mammy*. The ghetto girl can be depicted as either/or, or some combination of the three characteristics. *Tweeners* are comparable to my definition of cultural mulatto, which identifies cultural mulattoes as black persons of a working-class background who demonstrate middle-class aspirations, and are able to navigate between classes. Pough’s depiction of the ghetto girl carries negative imagery, but reveals the ability of fluid identities and diversity within intraclass groups.

The either/or binary encompasses a classist and patriarchal discourse. The binary preferences middle-class voices, romanticizes cohesion among blacks, and negates full representation of women’s experiences. The traditional binary exemplified a male-oriented agenda whereby males led the pursuit to racial uplift. The task of racial uplifting “highlights their [middle-class males] function as elites to reform the character and manage the behavior of the black masses” (Gaines “Racial Uplift”). The objective of racial uplift provides a space for middle-class blacks and males to gain agency as actors for equality. The classist and patriarchal discourse of racial uplifting excludes the contributions of women and working-class people. By excluding the voices and participation of women and working-class people, the binary perpetuates an oppressive discourse whereby power distributes to middle-class males, many times promoting their own interests.

The feminist approach to the either/or binary of class identities disrupts the dominant patriarchal discourse, and creates multiple identity constructions, as Jill Scott's music will demonstrate. For example, traditional scholar Paula Giddings' depiction of black women during Reconstruction in *When and Where I Enter* (1984) focuses on black women's activism for equality and social reform. Contemporary scholar Gwendolyn Pough continues the feminist approach in *Check It While I Wreck It* (2004), which emphasizes the contributions of women in hip-hop in a male dominated space. Feminist writing serves as a critique of society and culture, breaking from traditions that resist prioritizing the perspective of *others*, those of a particular class, gender, sexual identity, or racial group (Dant 4-5). The feminist approach disrupts the either/or binary by depicting women as community actors, which erodes the idea of male-only activism. The representation of black female activists provides an element of agency and voice for these women.

Black feminism's theoretical approach to feminism germinated the concept of Intersectionality. Intersectionality originated in the 1960s from the Black Feminist Movement, but became popularized by professor and critical race theorist, Kimberle Crenshaw in 1989. Black women felt their representation and access to mainstream was limited by white female activists. Racism and classism led to the suppression and distortion of a true unification among all women. Theories such as Intersectionality are a start to move away from binary thinking and more into diverse identities consciousness. Intersectionality is described as the "analytical tool for studying, understanding, and responding to the way in which gender intersects with other identities (race, class, sexuality, disability, etc.) and how these intersections contribute to unique experiences of oppression and privilege" ("A Tool for Gender and Justice"). By embracing a paradigm of identities as interlocking systems of oppression, Intersectionality reconceptualizes

the social relations between dominance and resistance. In essence, a person can be privileged in one regard and disadvantaged in another regard.

Intersectionality is a *developmental* framework with the intentions of inclusion; however, it does not fully engage in the different experiences, lifestyles, and ideologies of all black women. For instance, issues of homosexuality have been marginalized within the context of black scholarship. Women such as Audre Lorde [black and homosexual activists], saw themselves as outsiders of the white feminist movement as well as the black feminist movement. Lorde recounts,

When you are a member of an out-group, and you challenge others with whom you share this outsider position to examine some aspect of their lives that distorts differences between you, then there can be a great deal of pain. In other words, when people of a group share an oppression, there are certain strengths that they build together. But there are also certain vulnerabilities. For instance, talking about racism to the women's movement results in 'Huh, don't bother us with that. Look, we're all sisters, please don't rock the boat.' Talking to the black community about sexism results in pretty much the same thing. You get a 'Wait, wait... wait a minute: we're all black together. Don't rock to boat.' In our work and in our living, we must recognize that difference is a reason for celebration and growth, rather than a reason for destruction (Hammond 1980).

The foundation of the feminist agenda did not fully engage with identities of class or for Lorde, not acknowledging an alternative sexual identity because it did not embody the ideals of respectability.

Secondly, black Intersectionality advocates either place blacks into one economic class status or act as representatives for black women of all classes. Whether placing blacks into one class for the purpose of unifying race politics, Intersectionality, consequently neglects the diversity of the black experience from working-class perspectives. Black feminist authors who use Intersectionality as a theoretical approach— one particular exception being Patricia Hill Collins who uses direct quotes from a large focus group of black working-class women (Black

Feminist Thought 2009)— often times speak on behalf of working-class women without any working-class women’s input. Robin Kelley contends, “class politics is based on the idea that people share a common experience as working people” (“Class Dismissed” 2005). However, class is segregated within the context of race and/or gender. Even within the commonality of race, class serves as a diverging point where commonality no longer applies. One step further, even within the same class, race and gender allow for varying experiences. Therefore, Jill Scott as a working-class black woman, has points of departure from women who share her same class or race, adding to the complexity of having a stagnant term, which does nothing to advance society’s understanding of Scott’s diverse identity. Jill as a college student and later as a Broadway theater actress carries cultural/social capital through higher social and intellectual levels. However, Scott’s income level during those times situates her as a poor working-class woman; thereby, giving her a different experience of a male/female or black/Hispanic nurse’s aide. With her cultural capital, Scott is able to navigate and gain access to the *American dream*.

At times, the binary romanticizes cohesion among blacks. Class struggles diminish for the sake of solidarity. By identifying as victims, a shared victimization induces the feelings of solidarity and empowerment (“Feminist Theory” 64). The threat of racial oppression imposed by whites forced cohesion among blacks and cementing different socioeconomic groups together who may otherwise have drifted apart (Robinson 43). Yes, blacks articulated the shared sentiments against racism. However, the narrative glosses over the discord of class conflicts between blacks.

Although the feminist approach disrupts the patriarchal discourse of the binary, too often the feminist approach reproduces classism. The binary privileges the middle-class voice over the working-class voice. Middle-class privileging occurs through using black middle-class women as the primary subjects. Adequate representation of middle-class subjects does not provide

agency and voice for working-class women because the privileging deduces their social and cultural contributions. Mainstream scholarship of the feminist approach tends to canonize a few black women's voices, mainly middle-class black women to represent the group while refusing to capture the voices of others (Hill ix; "Feminist Theory" 6; Davis xi). Space has to be given to persons denied an academic voice and society is allowed to learn from those "speaking through the channels to which they have had access: literature, music, folk, wisdom, ritual, and so on" (Sprague & Zimmerman 55). The dominant discourse of class excludes working-class black women from the feminist approach. Working-class women become isolated and silenced within the context of classism. Frameworks pertaining to class such Marxism ideally aim to disrupt patriarchal discourse of class oppression, however, it lacks in effectively being inclusive because it leaves out the narratives of race and gender. Therefore, scholars created Marxist feminism to critique the needs of gender in a capitalistic society. However, even Marxist feminism has to be modified to address issues of race and class.

Contemporary scholarship that begins from the working-class perspective aims to disrupt the classist discourse within the either/or binary. The purpose is not to reinvent exclusionary practices, but to provide a counternarrative to the middle-class dominated social and cultural contributions. Music provides space for the working-class perspective to disrupt the binary. Black music genres such as blues, jazz, and hip-hop originated in working-class environments. Therefore, black music genres before hitting mainstream airwaves, began from the working-class perspective (Baraka 151; "What the Music Said" 92-5; Collins 118-119). The music expressed the sensibilities and attitudes of the working-class people ("What the Music Said" 30). By allowing working-class people, whether artists or activists, space society then expands inclusionary practices to balance narratives and societal interests. Allowing access and space to working-class people's experiences helps expand our knowledge of social relations.

Since music appears to be a space for class exchanges, I chose Jill Scott's music to represent the cross-cultural class and economic status exchanges occurring in social and cultural changes, which form cultural mulattoes. Scott's music reflects shifting social and cultural environments by Scott administering ascribed class archetypes to share musical space. Jill Scott represents the complicated and fluid identities, demonstrating the limits of language and media images of current socioeconomic class identities. For working-class people, music has been an avenue to gain a sense of agency and voice. An analysis of working-class music captures a generalizable depiction of working-class people's social and cultural environments. The music reflects working-class people's encounters, reactions, and adaptation to societal events and changes.

Music as a participatory cultural and social space encourages new aesthetic forms. Soul music in particular symbolizes cross-cultural exchanges across class. Soul music represents the byproduct of the Second Great Migration (1940-1970) penning northern and southern blacks of all classes in segregated Northern neighborhoods, thereby pollinizing southern and northern musical sounds ("What the Music Said" 14). The either/or binary becomes disrupted through soul music, a hybrid of both class and cultural production. A natural negotiation of classes occurred from the cross-cultural exchanges of working and middle-class blacks, reinforcing the binary, which (neo)soul artists like Jill Scott were trying to dissolve, leading to tensions in economic class division.

The change of economic and social progress for blacks, whereby blacks gained more education, employment, and housing opportunities during the period of post-segregation, disrupted binary class distinctions. The Civil Rights and Black Power Movements of the 1960s and 70s led to advances for blacks in "higher incomes, better housing, new opportunities for education and employment, meaningful participation in the civic and political life of the nation,

and the opening of myriad doors that once seemed hermetically sealed against people of color” (Robinson 45). The economic and social progress developed a growing increase in middle-class blacks’ population. The saliency of economic and social progress geared middle-class blacks into separate spaces apart from working-class blacks.

Once middle-class blacks, who acted as a social buffer⁵, exited segregated neighborhoods, working-class blacks suffered stigmatization based on race and class. For many working-class blacks, economic struggles eroded their quality of life. The elements of class divisions constructed different life experiences for blacks in different classes. By the late 1960s, “many if not most of the educated professionals had moved away. A community that once had been racially segregated but economically and socially integrated was well on its way to becoming segregated in all three senses-black, poor, isolated” (Robinson 57). Blacks succeeding in social, political, and economic ventures led to many middle-class blacks leaving segregated neighborhoods for nice neighborhoods. The progress of desegregation and the exodus of middle-class blacks further expanded the divisions of class among blacks, socially and geographically.

The either/or binary does not emphasize the difference in struggles among working-class blacks. Although each class felt the devastation of racial segregation, once segregation subsided, the impact of poverty benefitted middle-class blacks to “move up the ladder at work, purchase homes and buil[d] equity, sen[d] their children to college, demand[ed] and earn[ed] most of their rightful share of America’s great bounty” (Robinson 66). Working-class blacks’ neighborhoods, on the other hand, became the image of neglect and dysfunction. Working-class families were unable to afford the many benefits of education and material consumption that their middle-class

⁵ Social buffer describes the presence of a sufficient number of working and middle-class professional families to absorb the shock or cushion the effect of uneven economic growth and periodic recessions on inner-city neighborhoods. See *the Truly Disadvantaged: The Inner City, the Underclass, and Public Policy*, 144.

counterparts experienced (Robinson 66-67). In retrospect, distinctions between classes, the geographic distance, and the difference of lifestyle and ideology widened once middle-class blacks moved out of racially segregated neighborhoods. After the Civil Rights Movement, distinguishing characteristics between middle and working-class blacks became more evident.

Post-segregation slightly alleviated blacks from the constant trauma of racial discrimination and violence, which allowed more nuanced black identities to form outside the context of race. The either/or binary of class reinforces class based stereotypes that specifically attribute certain behaviors to members of a specific class. In other words, the binary reinforces society-ascribed behaviors to certain classes. Scholar Adolph Reed illustrates the depiction of the underclass (i.e. working-class blacks) whereby the dominant discourse fosters assumptions about impoverished blacks that relegate them to people of poor motivation, poor moral character, and deviant behavior (Reed 239; Wilson 6-8). Attributing behaviors to certain classes limits the potential for understanding cross-cultural class exchanges. By cross-cultural class exchanges, I indicate social and cultural characteristics associated with middle-class or working class identities. For example, certain music forms, such as opera, identify middle-class cultural aesthetics and blues identifies working-class aesthetics. The limitation of identifying cross-cultural class exchanges then prohibits the understanding of how identities are produced within social and cultural environments.

Cross-cultural class exchanges (re)produce new cultural aesthetic forms. Social spaces and social movements, prior to desegregation, blended black classes into northern segregated neighborhoods, which produced new strains of black cultural elements such as the sounds of Motown Records, Stax Company, Vee-Jay Records⁶, and *Philly Soul*.⁷ The varying sounds of

⁶ Vee-Jay Records pioneered the Chicago soul aesthetic beginning in 1958.

soul featured localized deviations of soul, which captured the various regional black experiences (“What the Music Said” 26-27). With soul reflecting different regions, the music provided an opportunity for different groups to participate in cultural production while displaying various black identities. Each region incorporated the narratives of their urban experiences and the interpretations supplied sub-entities into the overall product of soul music. The soul aesthetic of regional sounds such as Chicago and Memphis epitomized sociopolitical awareness, teenage rebellion, and gratification of black culture in a ghetto narrative. The regional sounds of soul incorporated doo-wop, funk, and soul aesthetics alongside the message of ghettotization being brought into mainstream consciousness.

Methods

A theoretical approach to Trey Ellis’ cultural mulattoes provides the basis of analysis to (de)construct the politics of class distinctiveness within the black community. The theoretical approach to Ellis’ concept of cultural mulattoes provides a starting point to analyzing Jill Scott’s response to cultural and social shifts. A theoretical approach “is a basic image of society that guides thinking and research” (DeRossa “The Structural-Functional Theoretical Approach”). I will use Ellis’ concept of the cultural mulattoes as a guide to establish a working definition of cultural mulattoes specific to this study. Ellis’ concept focuses on race, whereas my point of departure focuses on a class framework. My theoretical approach takes a sociological approach to music to determine social behaviors of how Jill Scott as a cultural mulatto navigates between classes.

⁷ The creation of Philadelphia International Records by Kenny Gamble, Leon Huff, and producer/arranger Thom Bell in 1971 promoted Philly Soul. Philadelphia International Records label was home to performers such as Phyllis Hyman, Patti Labelle, The Jacksons, the O’Jays, and Teddy Pendergrass⁷. Other artists in the Philadelphia area not signed to the label included Marian Anderson, Frankie Beverly, Rachele Ferrell, and Clara Ward who also influenced Scott’s musical aesthetic repertoire.

In addition to using a theoretical approach, I will be using a qualitative, critical interpretive, word-based approach to discussing Jill Scott's song lyrics and video presentations from Scott's first album, *Who Is Jill Scott, Words and Sounds, Vol. 1*, to provide a meaning-centered understanding of her world. As Geertz ("Interpretations of Cultures" 1973) points out, "what we call our data are really our own constructions of other people's constructions of what they and their compatriots are up to" (9). The two songs analyzed were chosen according to their mainstream release in radio, for visual imagery as media images shape a cultural mulatto identity, and their placement on music charts and award recognition. Qualitative critical analysis is a broad term "denoting a set of several alternative paradigms, including (but not limited to) neo-Marxism, feminism, materialism, and participatory inquiry" (Guba & Lincoln 17). Qualitative critical theory "recognizes that culture is as much a determinant of the form of society as political economy" (Dant 156; Guba 30). Culture pertains to artistic natures as well as the everyday life of work, sexuality, consumerism, etc. Rather, than critiquing the sociopolitical and economic structures, I will analyze the effects that the cultures of sociopolitical and economic power structures have added to shaping black identities (i.e. Jill Scott as a cultural mulatto). Because qualitative critical analysis/theory is a broad term, it does not have set structures by which to develop procedures to interpret Scott's music and videos. Therefore, interpretation is decided by the researcher. Qualitative critical analysis identifies binaries as a form of patriarchal discourse. Since Scott blends archetypes to create a fluid identity, she disrupts the patriarchal discourse of binaries.

As aforementioned, this study is an individualized representation of cultural mulattoes. Secondary interviews used in this study provide background information on Jill Scott to strengthen her cultural mulatto identity. I use secondary interviews to capture Scott's ethos on music and her music influences and styling as it relates to cultural mulattoes. Biographical

information through secondary interviews and personal webpage are incorporated as interpretive of Scott's ethos and her music styling. I use information from social networks to supplement Scott's personal background information that is not available on her website biography. I also use scholarly articles and periodicals to gauge how critics and scholars situate soul [Scott's] music in mainstream and within the cultural aesthetic. Scott's selection of songs for the album is insightful of her (sub)conscious state of what she perceives as relevant issues and how she addresses those issues within the context of a cultural mulatto identity.

Scott's songs resonate a number of core themes that will be highlighted. Core themes are themes that elicit cultural (re)memory that identifies as collective meaning within the black experience across class lines (Gates 19). For instance, the core themes that prompt cultural (re)memory⁸ regardless of class are as follows: food, religion, and relationships. Relationships identify interactions among people within the complexity of public spaces through gender roles, family connections, and public affection (love). The themes organized the design of the coding categories of this study.

For visual qualitative critical analysis, two videos (*A Long Walk* and *Gettin' in the Way*) are viewed. Scott places herself in a black urban, working class space by shooting her videos in her old neighborhood of North Philadelphia with a romanticized depiction. It is romanticized because she captures the elements of fun, community, and love with bright color, visual scenes of children playing in the streets, people able to congregate on their porches and walk down the streets, an alternative view from the violence of black urban areas.

⁸ Cultural (re)memory may be transmitted across subjectivities and generations. Cultural (re)memory is distinguished from memory by generational distance and from history by deep personal connection. See *Hip Hop Samples Jazz: Dynamics of Cultural Memory and Musical Tradition in the African American 1990s*, Perchard, Tom.

Chapter Outline

The introductory chapter provides a contextual foundation that moves toward language to fully address the complexity of class and socioeconomic class identities. Cultural mulatto exercises the framework of identities confined in marginalized economic classes, but not defined by societal ascribed class archetypes. Jill Scott serves as a working example of a cultural mulatto demonstrating the divergence of socioeconomic class status and class behavior.

The second chapter provides historical understanding of core class distinctions after desegregation. Here I examine the differing images of blacks portrayed in media (TV/film/music and politics) caused by the either/or binary of class. I provide background on Jill Scott, which contributes to her being a cultural mulatto and I situate her between the two classes.

The third chapter analyzes Jill Scott's lyrics and video images. The results of my findings from the methodology performed will demonstrate Scott signifying, using the collective "I" and collective cultural (re)memory to identify as a cultural mulatto, and blending class archetypes to disrupt notions of an either/or binary of class.

The final chapter gives a final analysis on the ways in which Scott is disrupting the either/or binary of historical scholars such as Gates, Giddings, and Du Bois. Contemporary scholars such as Toure', Robinson, and Pough provide diversified notions of cultural identities, but Scott disrupts these notions as well. For future scholarship, I explore what derives from Jill Scott to illustrate the direction of new social norms occurring as revealed through contemporary music.

Chapter Two

Predominance of Binary Portrayals of Blacks in History

Black scholars of the either/or binary use dichotomous images of the Civil Rights and Black Power Movements as an indication of separate entities, fractured by class, rather than as an expanding agenda for racial equality. The counterimages, of the either/or class binary perpetuate contrasting class archetypes. The perception of the Civil Rights Movement projected a non-violent approach led by middle-class blacks dressed in elegant attire for the purpose of changing degrading perceptions of blacks so that blacks could gain mainstream entrée (West 44-58; Johnson 25-26; “What the Music Said” 45-50; Omari & Cole 788). The Black Power Movement, on the other hand, portrays a more radical, some will say more aggressive, attitude toward racial equality, led by working-class blacks (“What the Music Said” 57-58; Lazerow & Williams 4). Assuming one’s class according to their tactics of protests against discrimination is one way scholars simplify complex identities among black protestors. Black scholarship simplifying class categories disregards exceptions to class expectations.

Persons of a certain class perform socially constructed behaviors ascribed to their class. The image civil rights activists emphasized during the Civil Rights Movement projected a clean-cut and respectable image often affiliated with middle-class persons. However, people such as Angela Davis, Sonia Sanchez, and Barbara Smith are a few notable Black Power Movement icons who come from middle-class backgrounds (Johnson 25). Conversely, many of the activists of the Civil Rights Movement were from working-class backgrounds (Chappell, Hutchinson, & Ward 69). The activists’ ability to transcend class expectations demonstrates the flexibility of class identities, which disrupts the either/or binary of class identities. The flexibility of class identities indicates diversity within black life because flexibility opposes class expectations.

Since the development of television, we have the first of generations shaped by media images. A mass consumption in audio (music) and visual content congregate in collective spaces of media (film/TV/radio/politics). Media is most influential in molding public consciousness (Mantsios 610). As cultural historian Gregory Mantsios (*Media Magic: Making Class Invisible 2010*) contends, “media plays a role in defining cultural tastes, helping us locate ourselves in history, establishing [national] identity, and ascertaining the range of national and social possibilities” (610).

Television and Binary Black Class Images of the 1970s

Television is a medium that provides examples of code switching; a demonstration of fluid identity appears by displaying code switching. The use of code switching indicates subtle class exchanges. At select times, television characters would exercise black vernacular within the discourse of code switching, indicating the ability to fluctuate between classes. *Code switching* exercises “selecting or altering linguistic elements so as to contextualize talk in interaction” (Nilep 1). For example, in the *Jeffersons* television sitcom of the 1970s and 80s, the Jeffersons’ neighbor, Helen Wilson, demonstrated code switching between her personal and professional environments. When speaking to her white husband Tom and business associates, Helen spoke with Standard English. Occasionally, Helen spoke with black vernacular with Louise Jefferson, and often she used black vernacular when showing aggression and resistance toward George Jefferson. Black vernacular is the familiar cultural colloquialism of informal language set in social and/or regional dialect (Scott 2013)⁹. Characters from middle-class households displayed the use of code switching whenever suitable. Rarely the opposite occurred where characters from working-class households code-switched with lucid intentions. Working-

⁹ Black vernacular definition originated by author, Chloe Scott.

class people's inability or absence of code switching casts an assumption by the media industry that working-class people maintain definitive identities more so than middle-class people, due to their limited cultural exposure.

The use of black vernacular demonstrates the ability to fluctuate between identities, disrupting a definitive intraclass identity. Having the ability to fluctuate between identities, carries the ideas of W.E.B. Du Bois' early 20th century theory of *double consciousness*. Double consciousness characterizes blacks' struggle to live a two-ness, in two worlds/cultures (black and American—presuming American as white), having two thoughts, and two identities (“Souls of Black Folks” 2-7; Toure 68; Wright 215). Author Eugene Robinson reiterates Du Bois' notion in a contemporary setting (early 21st century), speculating, “Those capable of code switching have a chance of leaping the chasm. Those who cannot live in both worlds, who do not understand both sets of values, are all but lost. Being successful requires being duplicitous—being literally two-faced” (Robinson 205). An advantage may be given those able to code switch between black vernacular and Standard English and working-class and middle-class behavior, but in academic conversations about race and middle-class values, black vernacular is unacceptable because it does not exhibit middle-class behavior. In other words, mainstream does not identify with dialectic and cultural nuances from the *other*, the *other* described as less intelligent, less human, and less deserving. By *othering*, the dominant discourse justifies unequal distribution of wealth and opportunity without appearing one-sided.

Mainstream subverted the cultural nuances and dialectic of black culture through the television show *Julia* (1968-71). The television show *Julia* (played by Diahann Carroll) showcased a black middle-class professional woman who spoke Standard English, was a single mother, and raised her son to be respectable and well-mannered. Although my study focuses on the 70s and onward, *Julia* promotes the dialogue and critique of black

characterization on television by blacks, which contrasts the previous stereotypical, minstrel images (MacDonald 124-6). Carroll's character met heavy criticism by blacks of all classes because it did not embody the true realities of the black experience of racism or cultural pride (MacDonald 124). For Carroll's character, the consciousness of code-switching, which was a reality of many blacks of all classes, never presided because the message conveyed projected the ideology that race was not an issue in upward mobility. The character of Julia gained criticism as an illustration of the black experience because the character encompassed class complexity, disrupting the binary. Blacks criticized Julia for being a single mother, reinforcing matriarchal stereotypes, and diverting social issues of the time.

The Bill Cosby Show (1969-71) conveyed aspects of the black experience missing from *Julia*. *The Bill Cosby Show* included elements of black class through jazz and his afro hairstyle. Cosby's character fluctuated between classes as a middle-class teacher who taught inner city youth (MacDonald 127). The show attempted to show the realities of the underprivileged (MacDonald 127). There were not a lot of objections to *The Bill Cosby Show* because it attempted to meet the representations of black classes. Cosby as executive producer of the show facilitated the representations of blacks in this show. Cosby's show was one of the last shows portraying the interactions of working-class and middle-class blacks.

Television images during the 1970s portraying working-class and middle-class blacks allowed for nuanced depictions of the black experience, rather than a monolithic representation. Television shows of the 70s such as *Jackson 5* (1971), *Fat Albert and the Cosby Kids* (1972), *Good Times* (1974), and *The Jeffersons* (1975), provided dichotomous images of rich and poor blacks' experiences. For instance, *The Jeffersons* portrayed a middle-class entrepreneur and his wife who lived in a hi-rise luxury apartment in New York. The couple succeeded financially enough for the wife to stay home and employ the services of a maid (Burr 167-8). On the other

hand, *Good Times* represented the Evans family who marginally lived and constantly struggled financially while living in Chicago's housing projects. The working-class life depicted a life of gang violence, drugs, and despair (Burr 167-8). Despite diverse class depictions, by the mid-70s television images exhibited minimal interactions among classes. By classes not interacting, it's difficult for audiences to see any class cultural exchanges existing. If audiences were able to recognize class cultural exchanges, then the imaginary of the binary would be difficult to hold up in reality. Instead, television displaying rich behavior and poor behavior without the two cohabitating reinforces the idea of people behaving according to a strict, definitive class identity.

Film and Black Class Images of the 1970s

A prescriptive narrative of working-class identity continues in film as well. Black exploitation films (also known as Blaxploitation) of the 1970s demonstrate a definitive class identity. Black exploitation films depicted the lives of working-class blacks reinforcing intraclass stereotypes through degrading images ("What the Music Said" 95-96). Blaxploitation films presented images of hypersexuality, hypermasculinity, and violence ("What the Music Said" 97). Blaxploitation limited the scope of diversity among black working-class people. In essence, Blaxploitation aided the presumption that all working-class people engaged in a reprehensible lifestyle. Here is an occasion where the distinctions between class and status take precedence for purposes of clarification.

Some blacks idealized the representations of Blaxploitation films. Blaxploitation contained many of the core themes previously mentioned, but the films also depicted blacks as heroes, vilified whites, and showed blacks acquiring wealth. The ideology and visualization of no nonsense working-class black men and women, who had no desire to assimilate into the dominant society, heightened a sense of agency in conjunction with the militancy of the Black Power Movement (MacDonald 120). Blaxploitation films exhibited black consciousness through

afros, dashikis, and speaking in black vernacular as socially acceptable (MacDonald 120; “What the Music Said” 70). Blaxploitation depicted working-class blacks accumulating wealth, but the means by which they acquired wealth remained within working-class behavior. Drug dealers, pimps, and hustlers do not encompass respectable, middle-class behavior. Their income increased but they maintained working-class behavior.

Blaxploitation films threatened black societal gains because they served as a counterimage to the Civil Rights Movement’s meticulous clean-cut image and middle-class values. Although Blaxploitation films targeted both classes, black middle-class viewers expressed the most criticism. Author Amanda Howell writes, “These action-oriented films were on the whole anathematic to intellectual discourses of post-civil rights black culture” (2005). Civil rights groups such as People United to Save Humanity (PUSH) led by Jesse Jackson in 1972 collectively responded against the violence and vulgarity of such films (Guerrero qtd in Howell 2005). Middle-class blacks appealed to mainstream, but the lucrative benefit failed to seize production. Profit sacrificed the black image. The portrayal of black identity at its most vile benefited the film industry. As long as the image was a commodity, the image prevailed. Black writers and producers succumbed to the stereotypical images, of monolithic black class.

Music and Binary Black Class Images of the 1970s

Similar to the Civil Rights and Black Power Movements’ differing class images, music artists appealed to separate class audiences through their record labels. Soul music encapsulated black heritage, cultural pride, and evolution. Through Motown Records and Stax Records, soul music reflected counterimages of black classes. For instance, Berry Gordy created Motown (1959) to reflect the sensibilities of northern middle-class values and a clean-cut and respectable image in soul music (Watkins 47). Motown artists’ target audience consisted of mainstream and middle-class blacks (“What the Music Said 42). Stax Records, founded by Jim Stewart and

Estelle Axton in 1957 reflected the southern, rural, working-class experience through the artists' interpretation of soul music ("What the Music Said" 45). Record labels targeted their class audiences through aesthetic differences or aural and vocal techniques, lyrical content and dress. Emphasis on distinct images, lyric content, and sounds captured diverse class identities, maintaining the either/or binary. Yet, the foundational identities of artists from the record labels began to resonate and contradict the images and sounds they were trying to uphold.

Although Motown projected a middle-class image, many soul artists from the label came from working-class environments. The origin of their identities were already embedded in a working-class aesthetic, an aesthetic grounded in northern and southern sensibilities, middle-class and working-class insertion. A particular instance of black life of northern and southern sensibilities came together in northern regional areas such as Philadelphia to create a hybrid soul aesthetic. Philly Soul was not the sole creation of any one person. It was a sound that "synthesized the sweet harmonies of fifties doo-wop and the gruff, gospel-inflected singing of sixties soul into a new mix with soaring strings, a driving beat, and a message emphasizing the importance of community" ("Museum to Conduct" 2010). Unlike television images of only middle-class blacks demonstrating a fluid identity, soul artists of working-class backgrounds counter that assumption. Motown artists' ability to mimic middle-class behavior and navigate between classes establishes traces of cultural mulatto.

Politics and Binary Black Class Image of the 1970s

The War on Poverty moved to create open economic opportunities for the poor. The War on Poverty was first introduced by President Lyndon B. Johnson (1964) as part of a continuing plan of the New Deal to reduce poverty (Weisbrod 1965). The objective of the War on Poverty was to supply education, job training, and youth programs (Sugrue 264). Since more blacks qualified as working poor than many other groups, the War on Poverty intended to extend the

Civil Rights Movement by addressing the need for equality. The intentions of the program aimed to move into an egalitarian consciousness.

However, the War on Poverty failed to eliminate poverty or reduce discrimination because it did not address the overall economic structure of society at the time. Frustrations mounted by liberal activists and the working-class at the oversight of addressing connecting social and economic systemic problems. The program did not increase job opportunities for the working-class or prepare participants for changing labor markets (Sugrue 264; Self 36; Wilson 148). More conservative ideologies took precedence as solutions to poverty. Because the War on Poverty failed to remedy the problems of the poor, conservatives shifted focus away from poor environments to changing the poor's values and behavior.

The conservative ideas of modifying poor people's behavior shifted the initial intentions of the War on Poverty to a war on the poor. As previously stated, a great number of blacks comprised of the poor, thereby setting the stage for a more racialized and class based milieu. In other words, a regression of progress of employment and education opportunities for the poor occurred. Conservative thinking created prejudicial thinking toward black working-class people, especially working-class youth, as rebellious and lazy (Bush 8-12). The solution of behavioral modification led to stronger police presence in urban areas and combative measures against the Black Power Movement occurring at the time and black middle-class *management* (Self 36). The combative methods justified the actions of conservatives to quell fears of disobedience and secure the status quo of whites and middle-class blacks. The plight to secure the status quo by conservatives stymied the Black Power Movement with many of its members identified as youth. Resistance against the movement served a two-fold purpose: characterizing black youth as deviant and apprehending them, which led to dismantling the movement.

Politics: Justifying the Creation and Subjection of Black Class Images of the 1980s

The *welfare queen* image constructed by President Ronald Reagan increased the stereotypes of working-class black women and further impacted working-class blacks' conditions and isolation as those of the upper economic classes disassociated themselves. Reagan's concept of the welfare queen gained support by the country's middle and wealthy classes to legitimize war on the poor, which resulted in massive cuts to welfare agencies. The welfare queen entails the woman who "shuns work and passes bad values onto her children," is hyperfertile, hypersexual, improperly aggressive and obtains benefits to purchase luxury goods (Burr 167; Anderson 16). Reagan's rhetoric instigated against stigmatized groups as he idealized individual effort, self-help, and responsibility (Cohen 82). Portraying working-class blacks in stereotypical media images further isolates working-class blacks, disconnecting black classes in social experiences and elite ideology. As more middle-class blacks increase social and economic capital, a distinguished classist ideology takes root. The classist ideology of middle-class blacks aims to challenge the racialized stigmatization of the welfare queen by trying to disprove the idea of black equaling poor. By disproving that black equals poor meant a challenge to the prevailing discourse of all blacks [women] as improper and lazy. Institutional forces assisted in limiting the working-class by social and economic policies.

Reagan advanced his ideology of self-help with the assistance of middle-class blacks appointed to administrative positions. The use of middle-class blacks enabled the belief that hard work and not government aid resulted in socioeconomic progress. Black Reagan supporters (known as Black Reaganauts) consisted of a small group in the Reagan administration. Black conservatives such as Samuel R. Pierce, Jr., Clarence Thomas, Glen Loury, and Robert Woodson who led the attack on reallocating social welfare agencies (Cohen 81-83) saw themselves as examples of the self-made persona (ex. George Jefferson) presumably without the help of

government resources. An anti-affirmation action movement began with the belief that blacks can be self-made and pulled into the middle-class as a reward for their efforts. Black Reaganauts believed the cause of poverty stemmed from self-infliction rather than economic structures.

The objective of Black Reaganauts was to fix the culture of poverty. The theory of culture of poverty believes pathology exists, which recycles beliefs and actions to recreate generational poverty (Moynihan qtd. in Anderson 14). The theory of culture of poverty believes blacks are poor because of their own behaviors (“Class Dismissed”). The attack on social welfare agencies that benefitted many minorities deepened class fissures as many working-class blacks felt betrayed by these conservatives. One can speculate that the preexisting class binary reinforced classist attitudes by projecting disconnected identities of the black experience.

Reaganomics expanded the gap between black classes with economic, social, and political shifts, benefitting middle-class blacks. The class lines blurred prior to segregation due to class groups interacting in concentrated areas; however, as desegregation and Reaganomics converged, those class lines became more defined. Reaganomics is the social and economic policies under Ronald Reagan’s presidential administration through the Omnibus Budget Reconciliation Act (OBRA) from 1981-1989 (Cohen 80). OBRA of 1981 “proposed massive cuts to several of the social service welfare agencies, on which many poor and black Americans depended for assistance” as well as cuts to education, job training, and redirecting the progress of the civil rights agenda such as affirmative action (Perchard 291; Cohen 80; Stewart 218). Many middle-class blacks benefitted during Reagan’s administration through city political gains and public sector employment (Cohen 87). Despite affront to race and class equalities, many middle-class blacks abandoned urban areas for the suburbs. As a result of middle-class departure and Reaganomics, poor blacks faced the challenges of perilous conditions and isolation.

The inability to acquire proper education left poor blacks unable to compete with the changing employment industry. As previously stated, the War on Poverty failed to prepare poor blacks for the changing labor market. America moved from an industrialized nation to an information based industry (Kusmer 485-6). Reaganomics opened up the economic structure to the private sector, which created a demand for high-skilled workers and deindustrialized union positions. Deindustrialization reduced blue-collar positions where unskilled or lower education workers were able to obtain employment, instead increasing opportunities for educated and trained blacks to expand their opportunities (Wilson 122). The inability to compete with the changing employment industry meant a lack of economic growth. The lack of economic growth translated into a lack of social and political power.

An increase in black unemployment rates during the 1980s under the guise of *self-help* prevented poor blacks from finding steady employment. The growth of unemployment for working-class blacks further downgraded the dynamic of urban areas. Manufacturing companies left urban areas for the suburbs, taking with them revenue and resources (Robinson 62-65). The lack of revenue infiltrating urban areas led to unkempt streets and facilities and the need for alternative means to acquire income (Robinson 110-113). The perilous conditions of urban areas painted black working-class people as menaces through a criminalized portrayal in media outlets. The depiction of working-class blacks in urban environments ignored the social, political, and economic infringement occurring, which led some to take desperate measures and alternative means for the purpose of sheer survival.

Alternative means often times meant criminal activity. The increase in criminal activity led to further marginalization of urban areas. Part of the alternative means consisted of an increase in drug distribution and usage, violent crimes, and excessive policing in urban areas (Robinson 51-8). Reagan's policy for the War on Drugs prompted law enforcement to issue

illegal search and seizures on working-class blacks, which hindered civil rights for the poor through stiffer penalties (Watkins 204). News outlets corroborated Reagan's constructed images of working-class blacks by displaying blacks engaged in criminal activity. Similar to Blaxploitation films, news coverage shaped a criminalized image of working-class blacks.

Television: Shifting Black Class Images of the 1980s

The increased appearance of blacks on television helped solidify the ideology of Reagan and black Reaganites that there was no need for state or national intervention for blacks to gain access to the American dream. Television served as a reaffirming space that blacks were now included in society. Middle-class blacks wanted to distance themselves from any negative black images. As the number of middle-class blacks grew, the viewing public fed on a steady diet of positive images of middle-class blacks while working-class blacks were pushed to marginalized spaces outside of mainstream. Few shows exhibited black working-class life or interactions between the classes. Television shows such as *The Cosby Show* (1984), and *A Different World* (1987) portrayed the experience of middle-class black households of economic progress that demonstrated respectable values. Black working-class television images such as *Sanford* (1980) became rare occurrences. Black middle-class images resurfaced ideals of the Civil Rights Movement of respectable portrayals of blacks as a way to curtail stereotypes. The significance of working-class blacks being pushed outside the mainstream replicated the geographic distance and social involvement occurring as middle-class families vacated urban areas for the suburbs.

Television heads constantly aired shows with predominantly black middle-class images indicated executives' agenda to *persuade* working-class blacks to aspire for middle-class status. Bill Cosby as executive producer with *The Cosby Show* and Debbie Allen as director of *A Different World* promoted success through lawful and upstanding professions such as doctors, lawyers, and engineering professions. Middle-class aspirations involved working-class blacks

being college bound as shown through the character Dwayne Wayne on *A Different World*. Although blacks on television were minimal, the visibility of blacks on television fostered a promise of wealth and education (Kitwana 7). *The Cosby Show* displayed black middle-class cultural aesthetics (jazz and blues musicians, black art, and dance) to all classes and races of the viewing audience who may have been unfamiliar with particular cultural nuances (Hopkins 960). For many working-class blacks, even successful characters such as Dwayne Wayne still represented exceptions unobtainable by the masses. Middle-class depictions or aspirations provided working-class blacks a break from gun violence and drug deals. For many working class blacks, middle-class escapism seen on television, no longer sufficed the reality of a working-class environment.

Music: The Political, Social, and Economic Controversy and Empowerment of 1980s and 1990s Gangsta Rap

Toward the mid to late 1970s, hip-hop surfaced and articulated the angst of the racial and class inequalities in a postindustrial society. Early hip-hop artists carried the voice of the post-Civil Rights generation, serving as a continuum of expressing the ideas and ideologies of the Civil Rights generation (Aldrige 226). Artists such as Grandmaster Flash and the Furious Five (1979), Afrika Bambaataa (1982), Public Enemy (1982), and Whodini (1983) articulated critiques on black mass incarceration, discrimination, capitalism, and oppression. This early discourse by sociopolitical conscious rappers of the changing economic, social, and political landscape, most notably, on black working-class urban youth, transcended into a more radical discourse in gangsta rap.

Gangsta rap is largely associated with working-class blacks. It started out of the backlash of the economic obstacle of Reaganomics and middle-class departure that created a feeling of contempt, which fueled the aggressive expression of hip-hop by black working-class youth. Gangsta rap articulated the frustrations of many working-class blacks during the 1980s and

1990s. Gangsta rap identifies a genre of black music depicting the lives of inner city black youth, a harsh reality of violence, gangs, drugs, and police brutality (Phillips 1992). Gangsta rap provided a platform for working-class black youth to express and highlight dissatisfied black voices from the margins of urban America; and “a form of storytelling accompanied by rhythmic, electronically based music” served to dialogue the critical narratives of the abandoned black youth culture (Rose 2; “What the Music Said” 160-162). Rappers used gangsta rap as an opportunity to bring awareness to the discrepancies of working-class urban areas through radio and television airwaves. Mainstream took notice of gangsta rap with harsh criticism by conservatives who did not understand the connection between gangsta rap’s lyrics describing the afflictions of black urban environments and the racial and social injustices and obligations of community and political figures to resolve issues of poverty.

The outlaw and rebellious images of black urban youth of the desegregation era took on the image of civil disobedience in the same manner as the Black Power Movement. Gangsta rappers acted as protestors against the attacks on the black impoverished community. Gangsta rappers saw themselves as modern day griots or investigative reporters on the street level, expressing the trepidations of poverty consisting of abandonment, police brutality, drug distribution, and lack of education and employment (Watkins 46; Morrison 188). The national forum of gangsta rap caught the world’s attention of continuing inequalities against blacks and the collapse of justice for blacks (Kitwana 10, 18). Gangsta rap represented a critique of a corporate-driven, capitalistic society. Gangsta rappers realized the effect inequalities of society had on working-class blacks, but the violence surrounding gangsta rap made it difficult for people outside of the black urban communities to know whether their acts of rebellion (i.e. gangsta rap) strived for transformation or destruction. Gangsta rappers report the social and political collapse of society infringed upon working-class blacks.

The civil disobedience of gangsta rap came as a result of the unfulfilled promises from the Civil Rights and Black Power Movements. As the first generation after desegregation, young blacks had rightful expectations that the racial, economic, and political inequalities suffered from previous generations would dissipate, creating reachable goals to the *American Dream*. The conceivable threat of violence reminded many whites and middle-class black conservatives of the unrest and violent days of the 1960s and early 70s. Similar to Black Power, gangsta rap disrupted the status quo of society as conservatives challenged anything outside of mainstream. The history of radical movements in America facilitated a misunderstanding by people from the segregation generation and middle-class communities from understanding the nature of gangsta rap's message for justice and equality, the same message misunderstood by activists for Black Power. Gangsta rap resurfaced the militancy and aggressiveness of the Black Power Movement, meaning gangsta rap resurfaced the movement's negative images (Kitwana 23). The images reinforced negative attitudes of working-class urban blacks as hypersexual, violent, and hypermasculine, same as Blaxploitation (Krazewski 50-51). Gangsta rap heightened the fear of black violence. Due to fear, the need for justice and equality cited in gangsta rap lyrics got trampled and distorted, similar to the Black Panthers and the Black Power Movement.

Although gangsta rap adopted a revolutionary consciousness, common to working-class people, black middle-class conservatives often suppressed the activism and foundational message of gangsta rappers. The black middle-class acted as oppressors to gangsta rap by trying to sanction the music before Congressional hearings because of its misogynistic and violent narratives. C. Delores Tucker (chairwoman for the National Political Congress of Black Women) and singer Dionne Warwick testified before Congress in 1994 against gangsta rap¹⁰ for

¹⁰ There were no gangsta rappers invited to speak in favor of gangsta rap.

the purpose of censorship and civil responsibility (Keyes 163). An elitist attitude toward rap ensued, which condemned rap without giving recognition to the root cause or grounded messages embedded in the lyrics (Kitwana 23, 41; Watkins 163). Middle-class blacks often ignored the core elements of gangsta rap's frustrations, the same frustrations (inequality, under/unemployment, political representation, and social isolation) felt during segregation, but not resolved. The social, political, and economic advancements granted to some blacks from the Civil Rights and Black Power generations provided quick-fixes to the overwhelming structural deficiencies of American society. In return, many middle-class blacks assumed a privileged, pacifist approach, which disconnected them from the realities of black poverty.

For the desegregation generation, opportunities that raised blacks into a middle-class status during the 1960s and 1970s no longer existed. Then, blacks had reached middle-class status from low-skilled jobs such as civil service positions. Unfortunately, under the Reagan administration, these jobs were cut from funding and the economy shifted. Technological jobs and globalized outsourcing replaced industrialized positions causing struggling black youth to support themselves through minimum wage jobs (Kitwana 29). A forty-hour work week at minimum wage positions did not allow black youth the same financial attainment as middle-class blacks (Kitwana 29-30). However, gangsta rap's lyrics of a luxurious lifestyle enticed many to explore entrepreneurial ventures of film, fashion, and independent record labels. Rap replaced monetary resources for impoverished blacks to obtain revenue in order to escape the elements of poverty. Rap advanced the American dream for blacks to gain wealth through entertainment.

*Popcorn rap*¹¹ occurred simultaneously to gangsta rap during the late 1980s and early 90s. Popcorn rap characterized lighthearted and dance-party music. For example, rappers Fresh Prince and DJ Jazzy Jeff (1987), Heavy D & the Boyz (1987), Kid n Play (1987), and MC Hammer (1990) popularized a style of music that did not mention the nihilism of black urban environments. Songs such as Fresh Prince and DJ Jazzy Jeff's *Parents Just Don't Understand* (1988) focused on the fun and mischievousness of adolescent rebellion. Teenagers related to rebellious acts of throwing parties and joyriding while the parents are away (Smith 1988). Kid 'n Play offered a counternarrative to the negative images of black urban youth violence. Both Fresh Prince and Kid 'n Play transitioned into film and television, offering a more positive and diverse image of blacks. The images of *popcorn* rap artists entered mainstream successfully as less threatening, juxtaposed to the image of hypermasculinity from gangsta rap. However, the positive images could not compete with the growing urban images that projected fear and mayhem, images associated with the working-class.

Television in the 1990s

An increase in fictional and *reality* cop shows reinforced the ideas of black youth as deviant and deserving of prison as a way of removing them from society. Shows such as *Cops* (1989) and *Oz* (1997) presented crime and prison culture into the mainstream. *Cops* depicted an unscripted documentary, following the patrols of law enforcement in various cities to promote an anti-crime objective. The creator of *Cops*, John Langley states that he purposefully skews race in contrast to what statistics reveal to quell criticism of misrepresentation of people of color, "I show more white people than statistically what the truth is in terms of street crime" (Shapiro

¹¹ *Popcorn rap* a term used by Jada Pinkett-Smith to identify the light-hearted and simplistic lyrical style of commercialized rap. The rap style is equivalent to pop music marketed for mass appeal. It is a style of music without artistic depth.

205). Statistics reveal that seventy percent of people of color are incarcerated and thirty percent are white (“Masked Racism” 645; Sklar 312). Even in the showing white working-class, the narrative frames deviance as a behavior committed by working-class people. In turn, the show exhibits an attitude that only poor people commit crimes. *Cops* functioned as the *messenger of reality* without giving meaningful background to the economic and sociopolitical decay in black urban areas that created the deviance.

Gangsta Films as Speaking for the Working-Class

The core themes of gangsta rap (drugs, gang violence, police brutality, and misogyny) made their way to Hollywood movie screens. The lyrics of gangsta rap now had an accommodating visual of the realities of black urban environments. Movies such as *Boyz N the Hood* (1991), *Juice* (1992) and *Menace to Society* (1993) reinforced the trepidations of poverty by depicting gun violence, gangs, drugs, and misogyny. Similar to the early days of Blaxploitation films, gangsta films marketed to all race and class audiences, but were mainly viewed by working-class blacks (“What the Music Said” 140-47). The commercialization of rap music and the mainstream visibility of black fashion, entertainers, and athletes appealed to younger audiences (Kitwana 123). Similar to gangsta rap, the films set out to create visibility and awareness to an invisible and voiceless group. Gangsta films added to a growing urban market of black entrepreneurship and advertisements centered around hip-hop.

Marketing of gangsta films by black film directors and writers began for the purposes of showing mainstream the indignities of daily occurrences of living in a black, impoverished urban area filled with ugly realities to survive a meaningless state of gang drive-by shootings, neighborhood decay, and financial struggles. Mainstream executives, on the other hand, realized the global impact and monetary gain stemming from gangsta films in the same manner as gangsta rap. Black filmmakers found themselves in the same position as white executives of

having to answer questions by black middle-class conservatives as to why are they contributing to the detriment of black youth (Kitwana 122, 139-40). Middle-class conservatives also viewed gangsta films as shaping a generation of youth to accept nihilism as a part of a black identity (Painter 366). Middle-class conservatives shifted blame of black hedonistic perversions onto visual images projected by mainstream films of sex, violence, and vandalism (Kitwana 140). The films depicted experiences some black youth suffered, and the viability of black as a commodity fed into the sensationalism of exaggerated tales, which became formulaic of what *hood* life and *hood* mentality entailed. In doing so, gangsta films had the platform to inform and educate the mainstream of diverse intraclass identities and reasons as to why the occurrences of violence began and persisted in urban environments, but these films fell short in educating the public.

Black Love in Film as Class Unifier

During the mid to late 1990s a surge in black romantic films such as *Jason's Lyric* (1994) and *Love Jones* (1997) generated images of working-class and middle-class blacks within the frame of romance. Romance projected an image of stability and love among all classes of blacks, no matter how dysfunctional or respectable their environments. *Jason's Lyric* depicted the lives of two working-class people who find love with each other amongst the struggle of poverty, crime, and violence. The counterimage of *Love Jones* captured what writer Kia Natisse classifies as "the black renaissance revival, exuding a very bohemian, neo-intellectual world" (Grio.com), which included a soundtrack that featured restored vintage soul in a digitized and acoustic aesthetic, R&B, and jazz compositions. *Love Jones* reflected striving black professionals achieving the American dream of success who enjoyed cultural activities of poetry and jazz. The black romance films displayed a calmer side to black urban life.

Another movie, *Brown Sugar* (2002) centered on the lives of two young black professionals who have a love affair with each other and with original hip-hop. The characters grew up in the projects of New York, but entered higher economic classes in esteemed professional positions after receiving college degrees. The film reconceptualized hip-hop from the pronounced violent and misogynistic images. *Brown Sugar* revealed the love/hate relationship many post-segregation generationers had with hip-hop's over commercialization and degrading images, yet the potential to empower generations (Harris 2012). The film placed focus on music as art and as a unifying mechanism, hip-hop's, MC rhyming skills, and the calmer conscious message rather than the violence of hip-hop's subgenre, gangsta rap. *Brown Sugar* and *Love Jones* presented music [hip-hop and jazz] and poetry in an intellectual space, cloaked in middle-class aspirations. Jazz was once considered a working-class aesthetic, however, with the onset of reviving black cultural aesthetics, jazz was reappropriated as a middle-class aesthetic by the end of the 1980s. Jazz asserted the image that upward mobility is also attainable outside of entertainment and deviance. The black romance films displayed the importance of love at a time when black on black crime was at an all-time high. These films signified a reclaiming of hip-hop as a community, and reclaiming its intended message and image out of white mainstream marketing.

Musical Growth of Hip-hop in the 1990s

The creation of new jack swing provided opportunity for musically talented youth who did not rap to express their music ability while still maintaining the same street credibility of gangsta rappers. Maintaining street credibility was important in the context of *keepin' it real* for the sake of creative authenticity within black identity, and for aesthetic appeal. Music producer Teddy Riley pioneered new jack swing during the late 1980s and early 90s, which epitomized the gritty street oriented sounds of hip-hop in an R&B style by digitizing the instrumentation, similar

to the technology transformation of hip-hop deejaying. The term *new jack* first expressed by Village Voice writer Barry Michael Cooper, described criminals in Harlem in the 1980s (“New Jack Swing in a Nutshell” 7). The sound of new jack swing mixed hip-hop rhythms and soul, aligned with the bravado of machismo through sexual lyrics (Hunter 34). The soul artists of yesteryears projected a sensitive image, which would lie in contrast to gangsta rap. In order for R&B/soul artists of the 90s to access street credibility, they had to declare their manhood. Although new jack swing toned down the projected hypermasculine criminal lifestyle of hip-hop, the sexually provocative lyrics did not sugarcoat the innuendos once found in blues and soul music.

New jack swing attempted to bridge the gap between the segregation and desegregation generations by taking music from artists of the segregation era and putting it into the parent of gangsta rap, hip-hop. As music artists became more sophisticated with digitized technique, many deejays and producers started *sampling* music from previous eras and from various music genres. *Sampling* occurs when an artist(s) takes a portion of music (snippet) from another artist(s)’ existing song and incorporates the snippet into a newly recorded song (“Digital Music Sampling” 2011). Rappers often sampled tracks from funk, disco, jazz, and blues artists from the 1950-1970s (Hunter 34). Sampling paid homage to artists of the segregation generation. The union of old and new styles of music lined the pockets of artists through royalties, but did little to bridge the generations in understanding each other aesthetically, socially, and politically. No matter how much technological advances of collaborations were used to help bridge the generational gap, on the social level the connection did not materialize.

Since digitizing did not work in bridging generations, a different musical approach manifested. As hip-hop began maturing during the 1990s, artists who grew up with hip-hop and rap, but did not participate in rap performance, revisited the union of soul and hip-hop, and

(re)appropriated the sound to fit their experiences and their aesthetical ear. (Re)appropriation of the sound included reviving live instrumentation and continuing digitized instrumentation.

Music artists such as Tony, Toni, Tone and Mint Condition, augmented high-tech synthesized grooves of the 80s with acoustic instruments as well as restored the emphasis on songwriting to discontinue formulaic songs in beats, chord progressions, and song topics (Hunter 34). The new matured sound of the 80s and early 90s, known as R&B/soul, shed the hustler and pimp narrative of gangsta rap and caught the attention of mainstream as radio stations dedicated evening time slots to the new radio format known as *The Quiet Storm*¹².

Although the Quiet Storm format began in Washington DC (1976), the format began gaining national recognition in the 80s (“Quiet Storm” 1987). The format served as a platform for R&B/soul artists with a more mature sound that appealed to all black classes. Artists such as Anita Baker, Luther Vandross, and Roberta Flack gained notoriety because of the adult themed songs of romance that were not projecting the sounds of hip-hop’s misogyny or violence. Quiet Storm artists belted ballads with tones of jazz, gospel, and blues (“What the Music Said” 128). The Quiet Storm personified another element to black identity that defied class lines because the songs escaped any political association or any lyrics pertaining to black urban life (“What the Music Said” 127-29). The sensual tones of the Quiet Storm diversified the black identity outside of the prevailing image of gangsta rap. The Quiet Storm format helped reestablish the soul market that was drowning from a market geared toward hip-hop. Even though the market was saturated with hip-hop and hip-hop’s subgenres, the presence of the Quiet Storm opened new doors for artists who synthesized softer styles of music.

¹² The Quiet Storm began by Melvin Lindsey and Jack Shuler at radio station WHUR. The name derived from a song entitled the same by Smokey Robinson in 1975.

Women in Hip-hop

Hip-hop and new jack swing represented exclusive male dominated spaces. Very few women have been successful in either genre, but those who have went on to become iconic figures of their time. Mary J. Blige known as the *Queen of Hip-hop Soul* personified the rugged attitude of inner city life, as she represented the women and adolescent girls who could not relate to middle-class sensibilities as she states, “I’m not sure why there hasn’t been another new jack swing woman, really. There’s nothing wrong with being hard-core. I grew up in a neighborhood where that’s all there was. If people are looking for long dresses and high-heel shoes, they’d better look somewhere else” (Watrous 14). Lauryn Hill signified one of hip-hop’s commercial successes in her debut solo album *The Miseducation of Lauryn Hill* (1998), which cut across several genre styles, winning her five Grammy Awards (Kitwana 10; Watkins 73). Women’s contributions added diverse dimensions to hip-hop’s narrative outside of the prescribed stereotype of violence, hypersexuality, and misogyny. Some female hip-hop artists fell into the format of rap’s hypersexual tendencies such as Salt-n-Pepa, Lil’ Kim, and Foxy Brown, while others such as Hill and Blige embraced their sexuality, but did not oversaturate their image with sexual prowess.

The soulful sounds of artists like Blige and Hill reminded critics and listeners of the soulful voices of 70s soul artists such as Aretha Franklin, Vivian Reed, and Chaka Khan and the nostalgic soulful melodies of Marvin Gaye, Curtis Mayfield, and Al Green. Hill’s folk acoustic and digitized sound, along with Erykah Badu (*Baduizm* 1997), ushered in the nostalgic sound of (neo)soul with contemporary sensibilities. The term (neo)soul was first used by writer, Joe Brown in 1987 for a Washington Post article, where Brown used the term to describe “rappers turned soul singers Force M.D.’s as ‘superior neo-soul’” (qtd in Lamar 242). The term neosoul, however, is trademarked by executive producer, Kedar Massenburg who discovered D’Angelo

and Erykah Badu in 1987. Massenburg was the first to market and sell albums around the *neosoul* sound (Lamar 242). (Neo)soul would go on to be a space dominated and popularized by female artists in the mainstream.

Black intellectuals differentiate between (neo)soul and soul of the 1960s and 70s rather than seeing contemporary soul (neo) as a continuum of 60s and 70s soul music. Critics refer to the death of soul after the 70s as *post soul* because this marks a time in history when America moved beyond its segregated history, which reflected in the art of music. Black intellectuals such as Nelson George attribute the *death* of soul music to digitization and sociopolitical gains (qtd in Cunningham 246). Scholar Philip L. Cunningham expresses, “Though many of the so-called neo-soul artists envision their music as a continuance of their forebears, this idea is largely rejected in academic and critical circles due to the artificiality of digitally enhanced instrumentation” (245). Differentiating gives the impression that soul music has two different agendas. By agenda, I signify that black intellectuals must assume the idea that a shift in values and attitudes in the space of social and political ideology has changed, thereby altering the representation of the soul tradition.

Scott challenges George’s *death of soul* analysis as she incorporates both live and digitized instrumentation. For example in her song, It’s Love, the introduction uses digitized piano then segues into artificial clapping via a drum machine before reaching a crescendo into the big band brass sound. Scott’s use of technology in the beginning and then erupting into live instrumentation and blending the two techniques is an illustration of Scott appropriating the sensibilities of past and present, signifying a continuum. Each music style has gone through a transformation as social and economic shifts occur, as well as a shift in cultural aesthetics. However, this does not mean the aesthetic or genre completely dies; the music reasserts itself in expanding and maturing ways. Present and past sensibilities involve topics of love, life, social

and political awareness, feminist consciousness, and continuum of racial politics. (Neo)soul embodies the cultural (re)memory of blues, R&B, jazz, hip-hop, funk, regional northern and southern aesthetics, Black Nationalism, and the complexities of a black, urban, intellectual, streetwise identity shaped by sociopolitical and economic structures.

Complexities of Black Intraclass Identities

Jill Scott was born among the post-segregation generation in 1972 in the ghettos of North Philadelphia, a place riddled with crime, violence, and drugs. However, as much as gangsta rap served as a narrative to North Philly and a counternarrative to middle-class images, gangsta rap did not depict the working-class experience in totality. Once again, the archetype images and ascribed class behaviors limit and prohibit the ability to view diverse aspects and experiences within same and different classes. Jill Scott's working-class experience is different from the criminal lifestyle of gangsta rapper Biggie Smalls (also known as Notorious B.I.G) as referenced in his music (Hampton 73). This is similar to author Adolph Reed's stating that the working-poor should not be defined by stringent discourse such as using the term *underclass* because it doesn't define all that live in poor urban areas (Reed 21-40; Landry 12-13, 225; Gans 103). Scott is a working example of how the images and labels of working-class people do not neatly fit into an either/or category. Parallel to Davis, Sanchez, and Smith, Scott's ability to defy class expectations produces a cultural mulatto identity.

Scott heightens the sense of fracture in a collective class identity as she brings attention to how representations of subjectivity are (mis)appropriated when identities within the context of gender, cultural exposure, and education provide different experiences for people within the same economic class group. Scott's ability to position blues (traditionally a working-class aesthetic) and jazz (a middle-class aesthetic) in the same musical space (*It's Love*), incorporating both techniques, allows her to advance class representations in historical spaces so that one class

representation is not privileged over another. This demonstrates that the two can in fact work simultaneously in the same body and not as a binary.

Conclusion

Black television shows beginning in the 1980s portrayed the experiences of middle-class households who demonstrated respectable values. The visibility of middle-class blacks assisted in the ideals of reaching socioeconomic status. However, the images of middle-class blacks typified *exceptions* to the black experience. The ushering of gangsta rap into mainstream articulated the frustrations of many working-class blacks when the American dream became an unobtainable dream due to political, racial, and economic oppressions. Music served as a platform for working-class voices when access to other spaces to express their experiences were denied. Gangsta rap reported the social and political collapse of society infringed upon working-class blacks.

The civil disobedience of gangsta rap came because of the unfulfilled promises from the Civil Rights and Black Power Movements. As the first generation after desegregation, young blacks had rightful expectations that the racial, economic, and political inequalities suffered from previous generations would dissipate, creating reachable goals to the American dream. Gangsta rappers' realized a systematic lack of progress increased their anger. Despite initiatives to counter the images of gangsta rap, film, and news media, the entertainment industry consistently put out more nihilistic coming-of-age stories of black inner city youth. For the entertainment industry, black criminality and death was a cash-cow.

Black romance films represented another initiative by the black middle-class to counter violent, misogynist, and radical images from gangsta rap. A part of the post-segregation generation opted for calmer and conscious music with lyrics of love, religion, identity, and unity, with infused genres of soul, funk, and jazz. The soundtracks to black romance films featured

restored vintage soul in a digitized and acoustic aesthetic, along with R&B and jazz compositions. The soundtracks reflected the growing trend of urban black cultural hubs featuring spoken word and jazz. Many (neo)soul artists, such as The Roots, Erykah Badu, and Jill Scott began their musical careers in urban cultural spaces.

(Neo)soul artists encapsulated the intellectualism of black cultural aesthetics through their music. Unlike R&B, new jack, and gangsta artists, (neo)soul artists incorporated other genres into their sound such as folk, Latin, rock, and funk. Jill Scott incorporated all of these sounds, but also infused opera into her music in the song *He Loves Me*. The original version does not contain opera, but her live performances incorporate operatic style. Scott's use of different genres conceptualizes the effect of the cultural, social, political, and economic influences on her identity.

Scott demonstrates upward mobility from the ghettos of Philly; however, she would not solidify the true essence of a middle-class identity because she did not complete her college education or possess wealth before reaching musical success. Scott counters the ideals of middle-class respectability because she is brazen with sexuality. However, Scott is not flamboyant with her sexuality by contemporary standards; during Reconstruction and up through the 1960s, sexuality was a private domain. Middle-class women, historically, have been described as sexually modest. Blues women and women of the Black Power Movement, on the other hand, openly embraced their sexuality. Scott, affected by the dichotomous images, embodied the respectability of Motown artists, the ruggedness of Mary J. Blige's urban identity, and the eclecticism of Prince, Hall, and Badu. There are cultural mulattoes throughout history, but with desegregation and the increase of technology in media (invention of television), globalization, and consumerism, class exchanges have become more central to developing a cultural mulatto identity. As Robinson points out, there are certain navigation tools, such as

code-switching that increase one's ability to have fluid identity, and gain access into other class spaces. Not everyone exercises this ability within intra and interclasses. Television is a site of class exchanges viewed by mass audiences, but this can be problematic, due to class stereotypes. The identity associated with urban, working-class blacks is a superficial image of teen pregnancy, gun violence, drug dealers and addicts, lazy, and welfare recipients. In addition, film and television images, portray the working-class as anti-intellectual, confrontational, dysfunctional, and gauche ("Class Dismissed" 2005). Contrastingly, the middle-class is portrayed as problem solvers, diplomatic, refined, and well-rounded "(Class Dismissed" 2005). Scott represents one example of cultural mulatto in which class exchanges are advancing and making traditional markers of class unrecognizable. The next chapter provides more analysis of Scott's music and whether she, as a cultural mulatto, successfully navigates between the two classes.

Chapter 3

The Signifying as Symbolism, Collective “I”, and Cultural Memory in Jill Scott’s Music

A cultural appropriation of a poetic background, college education, theater training, overtones of opera, gospel, guttural, hip-hop flow, jazz scats, blues idioms, soul-stirring lyrics, growing up in an urban environment with rural traits, and being raised by matriarchs (mother and maternal grandmother) with middle-class values describe aspects of Jill Scott. These are representations of Jill Scott’s framing and negotiating socially constructed socioeconomic class archetypes in a way to define and create her own identity. According to critics, Jill Scott woos her audience with her warm smile and home-girl realness. Although Scott’s debut album was released in 2000, Scott was already an established spoken word poet and a Grammy award winner as a co-writer on The Roots’ single, *You Got Me*.

Scott’s debut album entitled, *Who is Jill Scott Words & Sounds, Vol. 1* invokes the audience to seek answers to who is this Jill Scott. The album marks the beginning of a journey to learn who Jill Scott is musically and personally. *Who Is Jill Scott* serves as a diary comprised of spoken word and what Scott describes as “a combination of jazz, R&B, country, hip hop, [and] opera. It’s every genre of music that I’ve heard” (Waldron 59). Scott’s music gumbo reveals her cultural exposure and musical influence, which reads like a who’s who in music. Scott’s music palate of her influences range from Prince to Marian Anderson.

Several of Scott’s musical influences are cultural mulattoes as persons from black urban, working-class environments with middle-class aspirations and who navigate between working-class and middle-classes. For example, Marian Anderson was a south Philadelphia native who rose to fame in the 1920s and 30s as a classical and opera singer. After losing her father at an early age to death, Anderson was raised by her mother and grandparents. Her family struggled financially and it wasn’t until Anderson was 15 that she received formal vocal training.

Anderson navigated between races in the sense she was a breakthrough artist in a primarily European aesthetic music genre. Anderson also navigated between classes in the opera genre, a genre previously dominated by elites.

Scott's childhood followed a similar pattern to Anderson's in that Scott had to participate in a primarily middle-class aesthetic (i.e. Broadway theater). After her parents' divorce, Scott was raised by her mother and grandmother in West Philadelphia. Her family struggled financially and as a result, Scott never received formal musical training. Scott does recount taking a vocal training class, but only to learn basic techniques such as breathing. Scott states, "I wanted to learn voice techniques, how to breathe. I wanted to learn how to use the tools, but I didn't want them to take over and crush the spirit" ("Jill Scott Biography" 1999). The *crushing of the spirit* Scott refers to reveals her desire to preserve the natural tones of her vocal skills. Instead, Scott molded her vocal training, by practicing aural techniques and listening to various artists including her grandmother. Unlike most musicians from middle-class backgrounds, whose families could afford music lessons where they learn to read music, Scott maneuvers around music illiteracy by telling stories to her band to produce the sound she desires. For example, Scott recalls her grandmother's hum as a "back porch hum" which constitutes Scott's inspired southern aesthetic in her music. In order to accomplish the desired sound, Scott had to rely on core identities, collective experiences regardless of class in order to achieve a certain music aesthetic like a climatic gospel praise.

Although Scott's family struggled financially, Scott's mother facilitated cultural education by exposing her to various ethnic foods such as escargot, and different cultural environments such as museums, coffee and tea houses, and jazz clubs. Scott's music comes from her influences of coffee-house culture, enriched with spoken word and experimental

infusions and expansions of a variety of music genres being played. Scott's early experiences with cultural diversity gave her a fluid identity and transformed her into a cultural mulatto.

Scott implements signification, collective 'I', and cultural (re) memory through elements such as the porch and street, religion, and love in her lyrics, musical sounds, and videos to disrupt socioeconomic class tensions by blending ascribed behavioral class characteristics. Scott employs the aforementioned elements, which create core identities, as a cohesion tool for socioeconomic groups. Core identities act as sites of shared experiences, creating a collective consciousness. As each class is ascribed archetype class identities, Scott uses signifying to illustrate her ability to navigate between classes by applying elements of different class identities within this song. Signification means "a trope in which are subsumed several other rhetorical tropes, including metaphor, metonymy, synecdoche, and irony (the master tropes), and also hyperbole, litotes, and metalepsis ("Signifying Monkey" 52) encoding messages through shared cultural knowledge, which develops interpretation and meaning (Garner 258). In other words, signifying is when a person uses images, words, and/or phrases that work in a similar manner to a metaphor, which projects or indicates a specific meaning based on cultural experiences and (re) memory (Garner and Thomas 53-4). Each of the elements that contribute to core identities function as a connecting network whereby the text of signification enacts cultural (re)memory and into a collective "I" or collective consciousness. Cultural (re)memory transmits across class and generations. The majority of blacks' experiences derived from the poverty and southern sensibilities due to slavery and segregation, unlike whites who have acquired familial and generation wealth. Many blacks do not have strong wealth accumulated by each immediate and distant family member in the same way the Kennedys do. Most blacks are in close proximity to family members who originated in the south and/or poverty. Therefore, their distance from connecting to memory is not inaccessible in recall.

Cultural (re)memory is distinguished from memory by generational distance and from history by deep personal connection (Perchard 277-307). More precisely, cultural (re)memory “is shared outside the avenues of formal, historical discourse, yet entangled with cultural products and imbued with cultural meaning” (Sturken 3 qtd in Herndon 72). The communal experience of cultural (re)memory forms the collective “I”. The purpose of cultural (re)memory within the space of collective “I” shares a set of ideals by which relationships are established. This chapter provides analysis of three songs from Scott’s first album. The analysis illustrates the relationships of symbolism, signification, cultural (re)memory, and the collective “I” Scott incorporates in developing a cultural mulatto identity to disrupt the either/or class binary.

Gettin’ in the Way: Signifying As Symbolism

Similar to scholars who use a feminist approach to disrupt the class binary, Jill Scott’s video *Gettin’ in the Way* sets up a modern day feminist approach to give insight into a woman’s day to day experience in dealing with female-male relationships as well as the interactions between women. Scott navigates through patriarchal discourse by writing songs that many black women relate and identify with, including concepts of relationships and contemporary nuances of being a *real* woman. Scott navigates through traditional patriarchal discourse and spaces with a contemporary ideology that is not restricted by segregation or sexism. Billboard magazine writer Gail Mitchell contends, “When Jill Scott emerged on the scene in 2000 with *Who is Jill Scott? Words + Sounds, Vol. 1*, a heavy sigh swept across the country. It was the collective exhaling of thousands of women who’d found a kindred spirit; a home girl who understood the depths of their passion, pain, self-determination and other life challenges, housed within a refreshing sanctuary of R&B/soul, hip-hop, gospel and jazz (“Jill Scott: Hidden Beach Presents 2000). The video is the classic story of a woman being in a heterosexual relationship antagonized by the fear of infidelity. Yet, Scott is willing to protect her relationship, her home,

and her womanhood identity. A number of thematic sensibilities of an urban environment are touched upon in Scott's videos. Scott uses different class identities by signifying with ideas of being a *real* woman in 2000, using concepts of respectability, gendered spaces, and language. Scott appropriates cultural (re)memory through dress style and music styles, and resonates the collective "I" using blues idioms. Scott disrupts the binary by allowing these ascribed class characteristics to share space, whether the space is shared lyrically or visually.

Image 1: Mannerisms



In the opening scene of *Gettin' in the Way*, the audience sees Scott at home with her male companion when she receives a phone call. When Scott answers the phone, the caller immediately hangs up (Image 1: Mannerisms). As Scott returns the phone call, another woman answers the phone on the other end. Scott begins to bend the elements of respectability. Scott addresses the woman in a *lady-like* manner. By lady-like, she speaks in a soft voice, which indicates a presence of innocence, while the *other* woman speaks harshly and rudely in a lower timbre. The other woman's tone projects an uncouth image and a lack of refinement. Historically, the either/or binary of class between black women within the realm of respectability exposes the intraclass conflict of middle-class women imposing definitions of *real* womanhood upon working-class women. Presumably, the downfall of a working-class woman is that she does not exhibit real womanhood and has to be taught the virtues of being a lady by black middle-class women (Giddings 98). A real woman, according to traditional feminism from the first and second waves, typifies "normalize[d] black domestic and gender relationships in

accordance with conventional middle-class patterns” (Chappell 73), whereby the woman embodies femininity.

In addition to being lady-like and exhibiting respectable womanhood, we see Scott in her home with her male companion, the home representing the domain of woman. The home is the private space of the woman where she operates within the framework of traditional gender roles (Chappell 73). During segregation, private spaces for women were relegated to church and home. Although the man is considered the *head* of the household, the woman uses the home space as a way for her to carve out agency by keeping a decent and respectable home. A decent home consists of the wife making sure her man and/or children are properly cared for and loved. Her wifely duties are also inclusive of raising well-behaved children and sexually gratifying her man (Chappell 72-74). In Scott’s *Gettin’ in the Way*, it is unclear if Scott is married to the male companion or if she explores an unconventional relationship; however, she is willing to protect her relationship and her home.

In keeping with being a lady, Scott also remains rational on the phone, which bypasses the stereotype of the *Sapphire*, the angry black woman. Similar to other stereotypes of black women (*jezebel*, *welfare queen*, and *mammy*) the *Sapphire* stereotype paints black women in a negative image. The *Sapphire* character, or rather caricature, first appeared in the 1951 broadcast of *Amos ‘n’ Andy*. *Sapphire* represents black women as domineering, emasculating, and angry (Pough 80). By Scott, even granting herself and another woman to portray a black stereotype offers the interpretation of, Scott acknowledging media’s negative images of black women, but also acknowledging that there are women who fit mainstream ideals. The stigmatized stereotype of the *Sapphire* image is a way for mainstream to police for social order onto black women. Scott exercises the *Sapphire* image by illustrating empowerment and agency through reasonable anger.

In this scene, Scott's persona shifts to a different socioeconomic realm, thus disrupting binary class distinctions. Contrasted to the middle-class ideals of being a lady or exhibiting womanhood, Scott speaks with black vernacular. Scott sings,

Tellin' him that you seen me up 24th street
With them other cats
You keep lyin' to my man
Girlfriend
I'm gone take you out in the middle of the street and whoop yo tail
for all its worth 5.99 or something like that.

Not only is the song reminiscent of blues consciousness using black vernacular and a blues sound, but also reminiscent of the blues tales of *Stagger Lee* character as being the toughest and baddest man not to be messed with. Scott uses black vernacular terms such as *cats*, signifying neighborhood guys and *girlfriend* expresses sarcasm since the two women are not friends. The phrase *whoop yo tail*, expresses a threat toward the other woman of what will happen if she doesn't stop trying to take Scott's male companion. Scott's reference to the cost of 5.99 is an indication of a duality of meaning toward the other woman's hairweave ponytail, but also Scott implying that the other woman's is cheap and worthless. Although the use of black vernacular pulls at working-class sensibilities, the mass consumption and advertisement of hip-hop culture, which is heavily entrenched with black vernacular, exposes many across race and class lines to black vernacular.

Scott speaking in black vernacular indicates that Scott has the ability to code-switch, which means she garners a flexible identity in different class and racial cultural settings. The performance of "code-switching [describes] a person [exhibiting] both *decent* and *street* orientations, depending on the occasion. Decent people, especially young people, put a premium on the ability to code-switch. They share many of the *decent* middle-class values of the wider society, but know that the open display of such values carries little weight on the *street*: it does not provide the emblems that say 'I can take care of myself.' So, they develop a repertoire of

behavior that provides security (Elijah Anderson qtd in Robinson 202). Scott first displays decency through proper mannerisms of phone etiquette and *street*, then switches to an aggressive nature to protect her *home*. Home represents her relationship and making sure her relationship is properly cared for and loved. However, to remain able to fluctuate between classes, Scott has to establish and display her womanhood in a different way from middle-class ideals of femininity and respectability, due to her urban environment and its norms of garnering self-respect.

Image 2: Street



Breaking from middle-class ideals of womanhood is noted when Scott leaves her home and goes for a walk after the other woman hangs up the phone (Image 2: Street). Scott leaving her home, a private domain for exercising proper womanhood, to take to the streets, a public domain for masculinity, reinforces her break from traditional femininity. Traditionally, the lifestyle of the streets is not suitable for a lady. The streets are a depiction of criminal and/or sexual activity where respectable women are not present. Scott plays with the concept of the street and masculinity as she aggressively walks down the street and declares that this too is a space for womanhood. Scott has already established herself as a decent woman through her lady-like mannerisms, but her prerogative of fourth wave feminist thinking allows her to invade masculine space and still be a lady. The objective of third and fourth wave feminism exposes power roles in society for women in male-dominated spaces.

Image 3: Instigating Crowd



The video does not indicate where Scott is heading, but from the reaction of the people she passes along the way, who begin to follow her down the street, one can perceive Scott is heading toward confronting the other woman. The crowd is significant in the context of confrontation or violence (Image 3: Instigating Crowd). Third parties serve as instigators or as mediators (Oliver 116). In this case, the audience serves as instigators as indicated by their body language. The body language consists of arms folded, dropped jaws, wagging fingers, a hand resting on a hip, and neck and eyes rolling. Body language is also a collective language or core identity, which involves a cultural understanding in order to interpret the various movements.

Jill Scott arrives at the other woman's house with the instigating crowd at her back. Although Scott can be seen as the antagonist because she has gone to the other woman's house to confront her, she is not identified as the antagonist, but rather as the protagonist who is protecting her home, her relationship, and her love. All these are components representative of community building. Scott has reached the point of no return as she confronts the other woman. The ethos of the streets propels Scott into confronting the antagonist of her relationship. Even if there were signs of second thoughts or vulnerability, Scott has to assert her womanhood through an aggressive nature. Before the other woman comes to the door, Scott is met by a small female child rolling her neck. The relationship of this child to the other woman is unclear, but the young child's behavior is an indication that this child is not raised in a *decent* home. In other words, the

child does not display social etiquette by not respecting her elders through the indignity of her body language. This also reveals the other woman is not a lady, or respectable woman as the child is a reflection of the family.

Also, Scott uses the porch as the site of confrontation. The dueling of identities takes place outside in a public display. Same as when blacks from the south migrated to the north during segregation, Scott interrogates private matters and private spaces. These are no longer privileged spaces or spaces of class division. Scott represents a diverse identity (cultural mulatto), while the other woman represents a stagnant identity and inferior mentality.

Image 4: Stature



The camera emphasizes the size of Scott as being much taller and bigger in stature than the other woman (Image 4: Stature). The other woman is not only shorter, but petite in weight as well. Scott's size indicates her power and dominance over this woman. Scott's dominance and power over this woman symbolizes her ability to dominate in both the decent and the street.

Also, the difference in attire reveals the mannerisms of the two women. Scott is dressed in a head-wrap, a long sleeve shirt, and a flowing skirt that lingers below the knee. The other woman is dressed in a sleeveless shirt, tight jeans, and also a head-wrap. However, her head-wrap reveals her long, cascading hair. The flow of her hair signifies seduction and ideal beauty.

Scott's style of dress is connected to Black Nationalism, pride in cultural roots, and a diverse black identity. Scott's modest style of dress is resistant against the current media images

in rap videos at this time. Her dress signifies her incorporation of respectability, which defies the black stereotype of hypersexuality. Scott twists the perception of class as the culture of Black Nationalism shifted from being grounded in urban grassroots to middle-class as many blacks became more educated and economically independent at the onset of hip-hop culture.

Image 5: Unmasking



Instead of fist-fighting or rather cat fighting with the other woman, Scott unmask the other woman by ripping off her hair-weave ponytail (Image 5:Unmasking). The weave ponytail is symbolic in terms of the stigmatization of black women, black authenticity, and class. The stigmatization of black women who purchase weaves imposes a disgrace as being inauthentic and embracing European aesthetics juxtaposed to natural hair. In the context of Black Nationalism, natural hair represents an embrace of black identity and black aesthetics. Hair becomes a site by which black women struggle to create and define their identities and their relationships to mainstream and their black male counterparts (Kelly qtd in Spellers 224). With the growing changes of diverse intracultural identities, hair is a part of the black female identity and cultural experience (Dykes qtd in Spellers 224). In a Western culture that idolizes European aesthetics, hair becomes a status (and political) symbol among blacks. Images of black women's hair shift during the Civil Rights Movement to the Black Power Movement. During the Civil Rights Movement, the images portrayed black women with straightened hair symbolizing

middle-class status and the desire to integrate in mainstream society. The image of black women during the Black Power Movement displays women with kinky afros, symbolizing working-class status and the desire to illustrate a rejection to assimilation.

By Scott unmasking the woman, Scott illustrates that she is the *real* woman even within the realm of an urban environment. The two women are from the same class background and neighborhood, but the subtle clues of mannerisms indicate that Scott is the one that aspires to middle-class values and the ability to navigate between the two classes. A *hood* life doesn't mean projecting the mainstream image of black, urban working-class youth of dysfunction, criminality, hypersexuality, contempt, self-defeating, and downward mobility. In the regard of a hood life, Scott's snatching off the ponytail establishes a critique against 1) assimilation; 2) a rejection against the ascribed stereotype of black, working-class women; and 3) aspiration to be a woman of quality. Perhaps, here, Jill is symbolizing that she is code-switching to accomplish her purpose of getting her point across that she is the *real* woman and the other woman is *fake* as in having fake hair.

In *Gettin' in the Way*, Scott sings, "I been a lady up to now don't know how much more I can take. Queens shouldn't swing if you know what I mean. But I'm bout to take my earrings off get me some Vaseline" (2000). Scott is extracting the negotiations of respectability and class of being a lady or conflicting with this ideal image of getting into a physical altercation with another black woman over a man, which disrupts the activism of unity. As aforementioned, Scott in an urban, working-class environment does not have the social space to act within the traditional ideals of what it means to be a lady, yet acknowledging that *she* is the one who is the lady between the two women. The threat of violence over a man seems quite unlady-like; however, women across classes can exhibit a protective nature over their relationships or as

previously pointed out, over a disruption to the sanctity of their home, a place of refuge and agency.

An additional reading, according to Author Shanara Reid-Brinkley, Scott's use of the term *queen* signifies a Black Nationalist response to women who are *real* women deserving of respect. The queen is characterized as "sexually pure, motherhood, spirituality, commitment to the uplifting of the race, and in particular the uplifting of black men" (Brinkley 247).

Additionally, queens personify women's work that favors strong, black women and male public presence (Brinkley 247). The male is only present at the beginning, but not throughout the rest of the video, which symbolizes Scott's acceptance of masculinity, however, a departure from patriarchal dominance. Brinkley states, "the *queen* identity provides an opportunity to resist dominant stereotypes that position black women as unable to access this pedestal of their racial difference" (247). It is unclear if Scott is referring to only *real* women shouldn't *swing* or if Scott is acknowledging the other woman as a *queen* for the sake of sisterhood. If Scott is using queen as a unifying term, then she is committed to uplifting the race. However, Scott is positioned as the woman who exercises sexual purity as a woman being monogamous and personifies a *motherhood* identity. If treated as a continuous story, *A Long Walk* references spirituality and her man as *her king*, which encompass the characterizations to solidify Scott as a *real* woman.

Collective "I"

The collective "I" is a way for the artists to connect to the audience by using aural and/or oral signification and cultural (re)memory to draw upon a collective identity and/or experience shared between artist(s) and audience. Scott sets the framework of bringing black women of all classes into subjectivity through the collective "I" of relationships, and positions herself as the conciliatory agent between the classes. The consumer and media imposed identity enables Scott

to facilitate a nurturing and peacemaking image as Scott iterates, “Then there’s the media’s confusion about what to do with a beautiful, talented [B]lack woman who isn’t a size two. You know, opt for the head shot or stick her in a dashiki and color her ‘earth mother’. I’m a black woman. I have natural hair. I’m intelligent. I like holistic foods and things that are good for my body. That automatically makes you an earth mother. You know, high priestess. It’s not true” (Morgan 130). Scott feels the *Mother Earth* figure does not capture complexities to her identity and puts her and her music into a box, which she is against.

Cultural (Re)Memory

Cultural (re)memory identifies collective experiences, such as relationships, that allow groups to situate themselves in time and space. Scott incorporates class through intellectualism, her philosophical lyrics and tamed video images depositing an assertion of positivism without employing value into shock culture. Concepts of class are blended as Scott epitomizes various class aesthetics through her retro retrieval of blues, jazz, opera, and R&B along with soul in her music and poetic lyrics that are littered with cultural (re)memory of social spaces. By incorporating the blues and soul sounds, Scott activates social, political, historical, and cultural memories. These two genres developed out of the struggles of racism and segregation. The remembrances of past struggles assist in bridging the class gap, as well as the generation gap. Scott using these genres takes her forebears’ struggles with her; their struggles are her struggles, too.

Blacks have tried to reject negative stereotypes of being barbaric and savage, especially during the Civil Rights Movement by participating in non-violent behavior. Of course, the alternative to non-violent behavior was an even more radical and aggressive approach that many conservative black organizations such as the NAACP criticized. In lieu of violent behavior, soul artists lent their musicianship and persona to the cause of equality to challenge discrimination in

their lyrics, quell violence, elicit black pride, provide an alternative placating image, and/or merge black and white communities through song. Scott continues to play with class associations to disrupt how class is perceived.

A Long Walk: Signifying as Symbolism

Image 6: Women



A Long Walk signifies through religion and gendered public and private spaces to disrupt archetypes of class identities. The fragmentation along class lines guides public and private discourse. The video *A Long Walk* begins with a scenic span of North Philly. Jill Scott appears wearing a contemporary African-style dress with an afro hairstyle as she sits on the porch in the company of women of different ages (Image 6:Women). Scott gives agency to black working-class women by demonstrating that the black female working-class discourse is capable of accessing *privileged* spaces and expressing the black experience through the perspective of the black female working-class voice. During segregation, northern and Southern blacks and middle-class and working-class, constructed behaviors of class attributed to public and private spaces. Established northern blacks' ideals of respectability determined authoritative ideals of what behaviors were deemed appropriate for public and private spaces. The porch and street became central spaces for disrupting middle-class representations of a black identity in the gaze of mainstream.

In southern culture, the porch and street were utilized as social spaces. The porch was a common place for blacks to gather to exchange current events and interact in extracurricular activities such as eating and playing loud music, playing cards, and dominoes, singing, and

dancing. Established, northern middle-class blacks rejected these public social spaces because these spaces were too *folk*, which equated to *low culture*. Middle-class blacks perceived that folk activities should be properly contained inside the homes.

The porch and street also served as creation spaces for new dances and music styles such as the regional sound of *Philly Soul*¹³. In segregated neighborhoods such as Philadelphia during the 1950s and 60s, groups would perform harmonizing melodies on the porch or in the street; neighbors would gather around to hear the impromptu or rehearsed performances and observe duels between artists exhibiting their artistic techniques and skills. These public spaces were mainly male spaces because private spaces such as the home and church were designated as female spaces.

Scott's use of the porch and street symbolize her way of writing herself into cultural mainstream. Scott navigates through the streets as though navigating through masculine discourse. The porch and streets during segregation were occupied masculine spaces where male-oriented doo-wop groups were formed. After the camera spans across Philadelphia's row houses, Scott is walking from the street to the porch where she congregates with other women of different generations before walking the streets again with her male companion. By doing so, Scott gives agency to black women of all classes by demonstrating that feminist discourse is capable of accessing privileged spaces and expressing the black experiences through a number of identities inclusive of age as well. In addition, Scott's freedom to journey into the secluded space of the street, bends the notion of respectable behavior, once restricted to women who wanted to appear as *real* women, whereby restricting their mobility and liberation. The presence

¹³ "Museum to conduct month-long celebration." Rockhall.com. 21 Jan 2010. Web. 1 May 2012.

of women from different generations on the porch signals a well-warranted connection between ages as well as proclaiming upward mobility and liberation to all women.

Part of the black experience is the foundation of a religious aesthetic intertwined in black music. In this particular song, Scott references church images as a rejection to exclusionary practices of respectability and fueled by the piety of religious folks, which separates the community and perpetuates classism. Growing up a Jehovah Witness in a heavily populated area of Christians and Muslims, Scott may have found herself as an outsider within her own community based on religious diversity. Yet, there is division among those belief systems and historical class division when cultural (re)memory gravitates to the ideologies of Martin Luther King, Jr. and the Civil Rights Movement on one side and Malcolm X and the Black Power Movement on the other. During the Civil Rights era, the *face* of contrasting binary sides was middle-class, non-violent, Christian conservatives, on the one hand, and working-class as confrontational Islamic radicals on the other, each projecting class images of a divided black community.

Scott references Christianity and Islam, “Elevations, maybe we can talk about Surah 31:18. Elevations, maybe we can talk Revelations 3:17”, the main religions within the black community. From the Christian Bible, Revelations 3:17 reads, “You say, ‘I am rich’ I have acquired wealth and do not need a thing. But you do not realize that you are wretched, pitiful, poor, blind, and naked” (Holy Bible NIV 1392). The Qu’ran reading of Surah 31:18 states, “And do not turn your cheek in contempt toward people and do not walk through the earth exultantly. Indeed, Allah does not like everyone self-deluded and boastful” (Quran.com). These two scriptures discuss the notions of money, delusion, and exclusion. The scriptures construe a

jeremiad¹⁴ message, warning the affluent of excluding others because they are not a part of the *right* socioeconomic group. The Revelations scripture also emphasizes there is delusion stemming from a superficial focus and false security on wealth. However, wealth does not possess the essence of life, which is love and relationships of family and community. In the interim between her first and second album releases, Scott states, “I took one whole year and stayed home. I cooked, I cleaned. I read books. It wasn't a Martha Stewart life. I rode my bike. I hung out with my family. My mother, my grandmother, a cousin. I did very real things in real ways” (“Jill Scott: Poetess Soul). Scott attributes connecting to her domestic side and being among family as part of her creative process. Wealth, at its worse, develops disconnect from humanity. Although one aspires or reaches middle-class, it is important to continue a pursuit of unification. Scott later opens the Blues Babe Foundation, named after her grandmother, which is a community based program geared toward helping children from impoverished neighborhoods.

Before Scott unifies class (as now an upper class person) by physical activism of Blues Babe, Scott unifies class through her music style. Prior to desegregation, working-class women identified with the blues; therefore, Scott’s appeal to different classes exposes a generation to blues and broadens the aesthetic ear of middle-class audiences. Scott in a blues style sings,

Or maybe we can see a movie
Or maybe we can see a play on Saturday (Saturday)
Or maybe we can roll a tree and feel the breeze and listen to a
symphony
Or maybe chill and just be, or maybe
Maybe we can take a cruise and listen to the Roots or maybe eat
some passion fruit
Or maybe cry to the blues
Or maybe we could just be silent
Come on, Come on

¹⁴ *Jeremiad* is a literary work or speech expressing lament or a righteous prophecy of doom.

Scott uses the aesthetics ascribed to the different classes to share space in her music of *Gettin' in the Way*. Signifiers of the play, symphony, and cruises are leisures generally classified in the realm of the elite and intellectual middle-class. Signifiers of *roll a tree* (smoking weed), the movies, and blues are leisures associated with working-class culture. Interestingly, Scott refers to the group *The Roots*, which is a hip-hop group. Scott uses The Roots to act as a bridge of class and generation, disrupting the binary. The Roots is a Philadelphia hip-hop group, representative of working-class, but are classified as *conscious rappers*¹⁵, which gives them a neo-aesthetic positioning unlike the stigmatization of gangsta rap. In other words, buppies¹⁶ find them representative of a new age aesthetic of black intellectualism that encompasses traditions of old and new, being poetry (literature), black philosophy, coffee houses, jazz, Black Nationalism, and creating sociopolitical awareness about contemporary issues on black, working-class urban life.

Image 7: Urban in Color



Cultural (Re)Memory

As Scott makes her way throughout the neighborhood with her companion, the audience sees a number of outdoor activities occurring. There are a number of people congregated outside

¹⁵ *Conscious rap* is a sub-genre of hip-hop that creates awareness and imparts knowledge. Conscious rap traditionally criticizes violence, discrimination and other societal ailments. It aims for radical social change through knowledge and personal discovery. Conscious rap is generally an underground genre because the rappers are against commercialization.

¹⁶ *Buppie* an upperclass black person with an affluent lifestyle.

on a warm day. There are vendors on the corners selling smoked meat and snow cones. For blacks growing up in urban areas, this is a part of their cultural history regardless if they continue to reside in the neighborhood or have moved to the suburbs. Scott also shows the viewing audience kids playing double-dutch and basketball, a far cry from the media images of criminality and residents under siege in their own homes for fear of drive-bys and other deviant behavior by black youth. Scott disrupts the prevailing media image of a nihilistic black urban working-class environment by using color to send a message there are different representations of black identity within urban spaces as well as the sentiment that urban environments can be spaces of love, happiness, and community (Image 7:Urban in Color). The black working-class urban environment may represent violence and drugs to many, but Scott is redefining the perception of a black urban identity. In other words, all *underclass* people are not the same, similar to the ways in which the shows of the 1970s *Good Times* and *What's Happening* gave binary experiences of black working-class life. *Good Times* revealed a gritty and nihilistic image of poverty, while *What's Happening* presented black working-class life as youthful and enjoyable without the violence and dysfunction.

Collective "I"

Image 8: Relationship



Scott uses the trope of relationship to manifest the collective experience between herself and audience or amongst audience members. Another reading of *A Long Walk* renders an interpretation of a deeply committed and intensely connected love relationship. The relationship between two people begins the creation of a community. Scott is in community with her

audience, a relationship built on love of music, creativity, as a listening community, and love of Jill Scott as an artist. For further interpretation, Scott joins a companion that is invisible to the viewing audience until the last screenshot (Image 8: Relationship). The screenshot reveals that she is with a male companion, presumably a budding suitor or established mate. Since the male companion is not revealed until the last shot, this can be interpreted as women's rhetorical choice to be independent of men, but on the other hand, essentializing women's need for male companionship.

The relationship between her male companion and herself explores the possibilities of the level of their love. For Scott, love transcends across class lines for the sake of community and inclusion. From a feminist perspective, love is a resource of empowerment, "when we struggle to confront issues of sex, race, and class" (hooks 676). Scott blankets love with her companion as they walk through the neighborhood, a neighborhood that is supposed to fit the stereotypical image of dysfunction and bleakness. It is a love acknowledged and respected by the people of the neighborhood, and a love seen through the voyeuristic lens of the television viewer. Media images use the same voyeuristic lens to cast fear about black, working-class people.

Conclusion

Scott incorporates a number of themes throughout her first album. She continues to use core identities of food, family, empowerment, sexuality, and lamenting eliciting signification, cultural (re)memory, and collective "I". Violence and hypersexuality are also themes that Scott may not have first-hand experience with although in her environment there are instances of violence and hypersexuality that are a reality many face; yet the images of these two concepts are not images Scott wants to glorify in the same sense of gangsta rap and mainstream media images, since she engages respectability. In the context of respectability, Scott's theme of sexuality engages contemporary feminism in that women of the blues and third wave feminist

movement openly explored sexuality and conceived of sexuality as an empowerment tool and not perverse. Yet, the reason for the shift in ideology regarding sexuality was that public expression of sexuality stands as a challenge to middle-class values and domesticity as women of the blues and the third wave feminist movement recognized sexuality as one of the ways women feel liberated in economic and political realms. In the context of capitalism, “the sphere of personal love and domestic life in mainstream American culture came to be increasingly idealized as the area in which happiness was to be sought. This held significance for women, since love and domesticity were supposed to constitute the outermost limits of their lives (“I Used to be Your Sweet” 1998). Scott is well aware of the historical narrative of the black body being imposed upon as a capitalistic commodity whether during slavery or the exploitation of black women in rap videos. Scott places sexuality in the context of love and commitment and never in the context of deviance as hypersexuality. In this manner, middle-class listeners buy into the idea of black women possessing sexual agency as subjects rather than objects.

As previously stated, Scott uses her music as a unifying space for classes. Scott adds an authenticity of *keepin' it real*—a phrase developed out of gangsta rap meaning to be true to oneself and/or preserving the authenticity of and loyalty to black urban culture—as she navigates between classes without awkwardness or artificiality. Music scholar and critic Mark Anthony Neal states, “Jilly had been made ‘real’ from the start-fried pork rind, chic-o-stick, Philly cheese steak, pink roller, braiding hair on the stoop, egg and grits real” (“Songs in the Key of Black Life” 32). Scott’s cultural experiences as a cultural mulatto allow her to navigate without forcing unnatural behavior or a music aesthetic beyond her experience and proficiency.

Chapter 4

Conclusion

What does Jill Scott reveal about the ever-changing landscape of society? Collectively, the evolving experiences of an evolving society require an evolving identity. Contemporary scholars show us that class identities are changing, but can be problematic due to a lack of encompassing race and gender societal access, or encompassing the impact the economy, politics, globalized consumerism, and technology have had on developing one's identity. Cultural mulattoes develop out of this changing landscape that has created space for cross-cultural exchanges to occur transparently and consistently as a new societal norm.

Traditional markers of class behaviors that previously identified a person's economic class such as leisure, conspicuous consumption, cultural aesthetics, religion, and education have sharply declined in American society. Scott serves as an example of how the landscape of class identities by economic class markers has changed. Scott pulls from class archetypes where her identity does not fit neatly in traditional categories. At the time of her first album, Scott possessed a working-class economic identity, but her lifestyle of theater, education, and exotic cuisine palate represented a middle-class lifestyle. Along with the ability to code-switch in songs and in interviews, Scott demonstrates her ability to navigate between classes. Therefore, Scott disrupts the traditional either/or binary of class.

The media lens crafted a mainstream narrative about working-class and middle-class blacks that did not fully engage the nuances of black economic class identities or intraclass identities. Interactions between economic classes in television were rather minimal as television reflected the socioeconomic departure of middle-class blacks leaving urban areas. Middle-class blacks may have left urban areas, but cultural exchange of class still occurred in spaces such as familial ties, dancehalls during the late 1980s and through the 90s, churches, and importantly,

through media images. As a generation shaped by media images, the depiction of middle-class experiences, along with Scott's diverse, cultural exposure became embedded in the psyche of middle-class aspirations.

In turn, Scott used media to challenge the prevailing images of black working-class urban areas as spaces of nihilism and dysfunction. By juxtaposing the two videos, *Gettin' in the Way* and *It's Love*, the audience gets two contrasting realities of black urban life. In *Gettin' in the Way*, Scott is beating down the pavement, threatening violence toward the *other*, the outsider. Similar to *Good Times*, violence and aggression displayed in the character James Evans are real actualities of the black urban experience. On the other hand, in *It's Love*, Scott depicts a serene and calm idyllic setting where fun and love makes its way down the community block to be admired by all. Parallel to the pastoral depiction of *What's Happening* where the ghetto appeared fun and charismatic like the character Rerun, Scott shows us there are different components to the black urban experience just as there are in mainstream. Comparable to the human body in which varying paradoxes share the same space, contrasting experiences and identities occur in the same spaces of gender, race, and class.

The term cultural mulatto establishes a blanket identity without the contradictions of class and gender frameworks. Cultural mulatto defies class because it allows for a fluid identity that expands past economic and political shifts, and technological advances. Cultural mulatto recognizes that fracture and difference is not just generational, but also divided between race and economic class lines. Scott heightens the sense of fracture in a way that brings attention to how representations of subjectivity are (mis)appropriated when the lack of black working-class representations act as an *other* of marginalization by elites transfixed in glorified historical contexts that place middle-class people in positions of authority to dictate what are the *best* representations of blackness. Moreover, what Scott demonstrates by joining differing elements

of social and cultural environments of the north and south, more precisely elements of class identities, is calling attention to the ways in which blacks activate cultural (re)memory, signification and the collective “I” (i.e. core themes). Yes, there is a collective identity, a core identity derived from a historical consciousness. But in order to stay current to the economic, social, political, generational, race, class, gender, sexuality, and technology movements all of which have contributed to a multitude of individualized black identities, scholarship must position itself to incorporate the language of past identity and present shifts.

Scott’s approach to her music continues the traditions of the past while advancing current digitized aesthetics. Scott’s interpretation of soul engulfs performances of poetry, jazz, blues, rock, country, and even opera. Her diverse musical influences allow Scott to expose her audience to a variety of cultural forms. Scott’s appropriation of different cultural forms defies the record industry’s expectations of (neo)soul. Specific genres of (neo)soul, R&B, or hip-hop do not fully or sufficiently identify Scott’s musicianship as a cultural mulatto. Scott’s infusion of different genres, whether silently or brazenly, manipulates her audiences’ aesthetic ear in the context of blended class identities.

Limitations

Information dearth of scholarly research on Jill Scott limited my perspective. Most scholarly articles focused on (neo)soul music in its entirety, or sparingly provided a critique of Scott’s music. There is space for scholarship to critically analyze how Scott’s music engages a feminist consciousness or an analysis of (neo)soul’s impact on black class identity in the context of collective consciousness, contemporary black intellectualism, and black authenticity. My focus on Scott’s first album limits the analysis of Scott’s significant development, the personal changes (single, married, divorced, and motherhood), and economic status shift revealed in later albums. Analyzing Scott’s complete collection of albums accentuates her upward mobility when

analyzing how being a cultural mulatto may have provided Scott advancement into a more privileged position. Reviewing Scott's entire collection would be a good indication as to how she is negotiating class inside of a wealth space.

Future Research

The limitation of (neo)soul and Jill Scott scholarship provides numerous areas further research can explore pertaining to music, media, and race. In chapter One, I identified three class identities of political, economic, and cultural capital. Further research can expand analysis on how a person obtains and executes each capital to increase a person's probability of having privilege and earning potential in real social settings.

As my research assessed the power of media and blacks, and the ways in which white media executives orchestrated black narratives for working-class and middle-class images, a number of questions evolved as follows: Is blackness a constructed fallacy by the hegemonic race? In other words, are the media representations and cultural appropriations of blackness true manifestations of a black culture?

Lastly, since the Great Migration of the 1940s, blacks have mainly been concentrated in urban areas. However, with the increase of economic wealth and political agenda of urban renewal, many blacks have been displaced in neighborhoods of ethnic diversity. A closer analysis raises the question, is urban renewal changing the landscape of black urban music? Research must analyze how urban renewal affects the sound and sites of music production of the urban sound in black cultural spaces as they are decreasing. In addition, scholars such as Amiri Baraka conceive working-class urban areas as being sites of black cultural production; now that some areas are gentrified by middle-class blacks, how will class manipulate the black urban sound? Will the actors of the urban sound belong to the black middle-class, or have they always been actors, and in what ways?

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